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INTRODUCTION

It was the year 1939, a time in which significant events took place, events, which changed the course of history. I lived in Krakow, one of the largest cities in Poland. It was a beautiful, medieval city with many historical buildings and monuments. Castle Wawel is one of its many remarkable historical sites.

I grew up in a Jewish, religious and middle class family that had values and morals based on the ethics and principles of the Jewish faith. I had two brothers and two sisters. I was the youngest. My mother was not too thrilled when she became pregnant with me. She had four children to take care of already. However, when I was born, my parents adored me and my siblings were crazy about me. I was very spoiled by everyone. My parents were very young when they were married. A matchmaker arranged their marriage. I never heard them quarrel or raise voices. They were very devoted to each other. When my father passed away my mother said that half of her died too.

My mother was pretty. She had black hair and blue eyes. The best features of her face were her dimples. She was rather short. However more important than her good looks was her good nature. She was caring, understanding and good hearted thus making her the best wife and mother. She didn't have a bad bone in her body. She never complained even though her life was not easy in having to raise five children. She taught me to respect others regardless of their educational, financial or social status. I remember that she treated a servant working in our home as part of our family. She was less religious than my father as a example she didn't shave her head, as was the custom for very orthodox women.

My father was a nice looking man with a brown beard, black hair, and dark eyes. He was well built and of medium height. He was a good swimmer and a good chess player. In his spare time he used to study holy books. Everyone who knew him liked him. He was an honest man and a good person who always

tried to be helpful to people in need. He worked hard to be a good provider for our family, however his business did not always prospered. He had good and bad times. My father had some knowledge of first aid and could help people in emergency cases. Once, in our home a young woman worked who tried to commit suicide because she was despaired when her fiancée broke with her. She drank iodine. My father saved her life. This had a happy ending because her fiancé married her.

My father had a beard and belonged to a Hasidic orthodox group. However, he was not as strict as many would normally think of one who belonged to a Hasidic group nowadays. He never told my sisters to wear long sleeves or to not talk to boys. We had to follow dietary laws, observing the Sabbath and to say prayers.

My father had no problems with his daughters, but with his two rebellious sons. When they were very young everything went smoothly. When they grew older their behavior changed and they stopped listening to my father. New surroundings and new friends influenced them. They went to public high school and joined Zionist organizations. They drifted away from orthodoxy and this troubled my father very much. My parents never considered hitting children as a method of punishing. Besides, there was no need for this kind of punishment since we were good behaved. To hit grown boys was out of question. This was a lost cause. One can imagine how my father felt when the sons of his friends went Saturday to synagogue and my brothers went to play soccer. I remember their discussions and their arguing. When they started to be more excited and their arguments steamed hotter my mother intervened and calmed them down. This conflict between father and sons existed in many other Jewish homes, the conflict of the old and new generation.

We had a female dog, named Lady. She was a brown, slim Doberman. My father was not too thrilled to have a dog, but my mother favored it very much

and she prevailed. One could see that my father liked the dog, but I had a feeling that he would not admit to it, even to himself. Dog ownership was frowned upon in Orthodox circles. A very funny incident happened one day. I was walking Lady to a neighboring park. My father was sitting with his Orthodox friends on a bench and deeply involved in a conversation with them. From the far I did not notice my father, but Lady did. In one moment I felt Lady pulling the leash with a great force and I tried to keep hold on the leash but I failed. Lady broke away and ran fast toward the bench where my father was sitting. She jumped on him and started to lick him. This created a great panic and his friends ran away scared, but he stayed put, bewildered and embarrassed.

I was happy because I had a lovely family and nice friends. Some were from very poor families. Some were from very rich ones and lived in luxury. I used to go to their homes and knew their parents, who differed from my own. Their fathers were modern Jews, who did not talk Yiddish, only Polish. In big cities such as Krakow, the Jewish intelligentsia spoke only Polish because they considered speaking Yiddish somehow degrading. Poles used to make fun of how the Jews spoke Polish, so the Jews tried to improve their Polish proficiency to perfection and they succeeded. Some of the greatest Polish writers were Jews.

I was rather ambitious. I tried to be a good student and to win in games for example. I liked to draw, especially faces. Poor victims of my choice sat patiently when I drew their faces. The hobby of drawing and painting started in young age and gave me a lot of pleasure. I also liked to write short stories.

All of a sudden, my quiet, carefree life was hit with a great tragedy. Unexpectedly, my father got sick. The doctors could not help him, so he went to Vienna because Vienna was known for having the best specialists. However,

even the best doctor could not save his life. Even today it is too painful for me to write about this.

I remember the day when my Father, G-d bless his memory, passed away. It was a happy holiday named Purim. The Jewish youth in Krakow celebrated this holiday with a parade. Participants marched the streets disguised in colorful costumes and masks, representing a variety of people who played some role in the Jewish past, heroes or villains who wanted destroy the Jews. The crowds observing it were jubilant and enjoyed themselves.

I could not take part in their joy. I walked away; my eyes were filled with tears. Drop by drop, they came down my face, I could feel their salty taste. Only the support of my close-knit family helped me to adjust to the great loss.

Our life was not the same, but life went on.

CHAPTER 1

It was a beautiful autumn day. I was sitting with my friend on a bench in a city park. The sun was shining brightly, yet it was not as hot as in the summertime. Trees and bushes growing side by side were basking in the sunlight, emphasizing the red, orange and yellow colors of the leaves. There were colorful leaves all over on the ground, falling down with autumn breezes. The air was fresh and aromatic. One felt so good to sit there, carefree, without any worries and enjoying the beauty of nature. The children played joyfully, laughing and screaming. Their mothers or baby sitters watched them closely. A young couple was deeply absorbed in a conversation, oblivious to the surroundings. They looked in each other's eyes with an expression of love and devotion. An old man observed them with a mixture of jealousy, sympathy and nostalgia. My friend Sydia, was with me. She was a pretty girl with dreamy eyes and the complexion of a ripe peach. Her blue-greenish eyes were smiling as she turned her face toward me: "Isn't it a splendid day?" she said. I agreed. We talked about all kinds of frivolous things, jumping from one subject to another. We giggled a lot because everything seemed so funny and made us laugh.

Suddenly, we noticed that a large crowd of people was standing in the front of the entrance to the park. The unusual sight of this gathering aroused our curiosity. Something had happened. "Let us go find out what is going on," I said to Sydia. We started to run as fast as we could to the entrance of the park. There was a poster placed on the gate. People were pushing one another, eager to read the contents of the poster. People were excited, talking nervously in abrupt sentences that were hard to understand. Our ears caught only one word clearly. It was an ominous word: mobilization. This word hit us with such a force that in one moment our joy vanished

completely and the day lost its glorious brightness. A man walking away from the crowd said to his companion " the war with Germany is inevitable." The other man was more optimistic. "Maybe the war will not occur. This is only a precaution our government is taking in case Germany might invade Poland".

For a moment we panicked. It was so dreadful even to think about the possibility that a war might break out any moment. We learned about wars from our history books, but it never occurred to us to think that we could have a war in our lifetime. We sensed that war means bombing, destruction and death. We were taught in school about wars that took place in distant times. We were young and inexperienced and did not fully realize the extent of the destruction that every war brings. We did not know that our lives would be changed drastically in case of war. That naiveté and frivolity would end very soon and we would be forced to grow up very fast. How could we predict that our life would be so full of hardship, worries, fears and danger?

We were so excited and overwhelmed by emotions that we could not talk, but in silence hurried home to our families to share with them the bad news.

CHAPTER 2

When I entered our apartment, my family and our neighbors were gathered in the living room. Their drawn faces, nervous gestures and raised voices gave the impression that they were discussing something of great importance. " Mobilization," I uttered and stopped. I hardly could catch my breath and my heart was pounding fast from running. "We already heard the bad news," someone said. My family was distressed because my brother had received notice to report to the nearest mobilization center on the next day. Uncertainty about the immediate future gravely hung over our lives. The next day, my brother Leo was mobilized and joined his military unit. We said good-bye to Leo. We kissed him and our eyes were filled with tears and our hearts ached in seeing him leaving us. The possibility of war made us nervous and was the

main topic of our daily conversations from then on. Everyone was waiting for news. One question was on everybody's mind: "Will there be war or will there not be war?"

Anxiously people were waiting for an answer. Newspapers were sold out immediately after being put out on the stands. It was the main source of information because few people had radios in that time. There were a lot of rumors, but one could not depend on them. Some people used to listen on radios to news transmitted from foreign stations. Some rumors were completely false. We lived in tension, and prayed to God that Germany would not start a war. After days of uncertainty and hope that the war would be avoided, the worst prediction proved to be true. On September 1, 1939, the war broke out. Germany, the Third Reich, proclaimed war. The Germans attacked Poland.

CHAPTER 3

Looking back to that eventful time one should wonder how was it possible that the world was so ignorant and so completely blind as to be unaware of what was going on inside Germany. For years Germany was building up its military might and preparing for a holy mission to conquer the world and to enslave other nations. How was it possible that politicians, who were the heads of governments, did not notice the trends and sentiments existing in the Third Reich and did not see where the goals and aspirations of the Germans lead? Their charismatic leader did not hide anything, but with fire in his eyes and with a loud, strong voice proclaimed his ideological views. And how blind was the world Jewry not to realize that what he wrote in his book, Mein Kampf, was a prologue to his satanic plans for the Jewish nation. It was not an abstract tale, but a dangerous blueprint for reality. The world was not prepared militarily or psychologically to go to war with Germany. They paid for this dearly. The war with Poland did not last long. Well organized, well

equipped and modernized, the German army smashed, destroyed the Polish army within several days.

There was some sporadic resistance, but the Polish military units were dispersed, decimated and gave in. The battalion in which my brother served was almost completely annihilated. Some soldiers escaped and many were taken as prisoners of war and put into camps. Poland, as an independent country, ceased to exist. A Polish government was formed in London, England to plan some resistance. Several underground organizations were active in Poland to engage in sabotage and terrorist acts. A new frightening chapter of Jewish history, with tragic outcome, started to unroll. How distinctly my memory was imprinted with the first view of German soldiers proudly marching through the streets of Krakow. Disciplined, arrogant and aloof with stern faces, they gave the impression that they wanted to announce to the onlookers: "We are the Germans, pure Aryans who are above other nations. We are going to conquer the world. We will be the rulers who will decide your fate." "Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles," they sang. "Germany above everything".

CHAPTER 4

In the first days after the German invasion, Krakow looked like a ghost town. The inhabitants of the city were afraid to go out from their homes, not knowing what could happen to them. Many posters were placed on the walls of the houses with all kinds of announcements. People had no other choice but to accept the new reality and to try to adjust to new circumstances. There was no way of changing the existing state of affairs. All one could do was to try to deal with the new ruling body and to follow their orders and different restrictions.

Gradually life returned to some kind of normalcy. This was normalcy in the sense that businesses were open as well as schools. The new reality was that we were under German occupation. Poland did not exist as an independent,

sovereign state. Once again in Polish history, German invaders occupied Polish soil. There was no more war. The war formally was ended. Some soldiers came back home, but many were killed and many were taken away to captivity.

My brother was not among the soldiers who came back home and we did not know what had happened to him. Was he killed, or was he taken as a prisoner of war? Uncertainty about his fate was almost unbearable. Days went by and still there was no news about my brother. We were despairing. The thought was so painful, that our brother Leo, so young and full of life, might be killed in war. We went to soldiers who came back from the war to inquire if they knew about his fate. We talked to many soldiers, but nobody knew him or heard about him. Our hope started to fade. Unexpectedly, one day I met a young soldier who came back from the war and I showed him my brother's picture and asked him if he saw my brother. He said to me, "Yes, I saw your brother alive." One can imagine my feeling of happiness, but later, when I started to analyze his assertive answer, I was thinking, "Maybe he told me the truth or maybe he lied, seeing how much I was in despair. He wanted to comfort me." One thing was for sure. From this moment on, we had hope that he was alive. That helped us to go on with our daily routines.

After several months of hoping and waiting in vain for any news about him our hope began to weaken again until one day, we got a wonderful surprise. We received a postcard from the Red Cross informing us that our brother was alive and a prisoner of war in a camp in Germany. It is hard to describe our feelings of surprise, disbelief and happiness. This was the moment for which we had waited and dreamed and prayed. We read the postcard many times, to make sure that we had not misread the contents, that he was alive. We even thought that the Red Cross could make a mistake. This pessimistic thought marred our happiness. When, after a short period of time, a letter came from

my brother, our doubts vanished completely. To see his handwriting gave us such a great joy.

After several months being in camp, my brother returned home. We were so happy to see him alive and healthy, though he had lost some weight and his face was drawn. The Germans released all Jewish prisoners of war. One could ask a simple question, "Why had the Germans released only Jewish prisoners?" It looked rather suspicious and suggested a possibility that maybe the Germans had in mind some other plans for the Jewish soldiers. Could someone be so naïve as to trust the Germans and believe that they favor the Jews more than other nationalities, keeping them in camps while giving the Jews freedom? We were too happy to see Leo to even consider it anything but a blessing that he was once again home with us.

My brother was so glad to be home and was in good spirits. His story about how he survived was unbelievable. Almost all the soldiers in his company were killed and the rest were captured. He and another soldier managed to escape. They ran away, not looking back to see if German soldiers were shooting after them. They took a great risk. They jumped into the river Pszczyna, which was not far away, and were swimming most of the time under the water so as not to be seen. They noticed a single, white painted house standing alone that was not far from the river. Wet, tired and shivering they reached the house unnoticed and they hid themselves in the barn. As it turned out the house belonged spoke German fluently. When he found them hiding, he called the German soldiers, who took to a Pole who was obviously of German origin, because he them away. Luckily they did not kill them. My brother was particularly fortunate that they did not recognize that he was Jewish, the other soldier was a Pole.

German soldiers put them in a prisoner of war camp. Life in the camp was not the best place to be. One needed survival skills to handle different problems and situations, which emerged every day. He used to trade cigarettes

for bread, because he was not a smoker and an additional portion of bread satisfied his hunger. The ration of bread, which he was getting, was not enough and being young he needed more calories than he received and most of the time he was hungry. This is why for the first couple of days at home he ate constantly. Later he returned to his normal eating habits and did not think much more of his stay in the prisoner of war camp. Besides now, he had other problems to deal with, leaving no time to dwell on the past.

People got used to life under the German occupation or to not having any way of changing it. They had no other choice but to go on with their daily routines and responsibilities even though there was tension in the air, uneasiness of unpredictable happenings. Everyday, various announcements and orders to be carried out by the general population appeared on the walls of public houses. There were new restrictions and regulations, which concerned only Jewish life. One day they ordered all Jews to wear bands marked with a Star of David on their arms to distinguish them from the other Polish population. Every order had to be obeyed. Disobedience was punishable by death.

I had a friend, Bronek, who lived in Katowice when the war broke out. He and his parents left the town in which a lot of Germans reside and came to live in Krakow. One day, at four o'clock in the morning someone was knocking at our door. Surprised and wondering who could be, my sister got up and before opening the door she asked, "Who is this?" A boyish voice answered, "It is Bronek. I want to talk to Lonka."

I wondered what happened to him that he came so early in the morning. I dressed myself in a hurry and went out with him for a walk. I looked at him. His handsome face was pale, his blond hair matted and disheveled. "Lonka" he said, "my parents decided to leave Krakow. My father says that the situation of Jews is getting worse every day and he is going to try to leave the part of Poland occupied by the Germans and try to cross the border."

He had wanted to get into the part of Poland, which Russia occupied after having made a deal with Germany. "Lonka," he said, "come with us, my mother will take good care of you. I don't want to be separated from you because I am afraid that I never will see you again." I looked into his sad blue eyes and I felt a lump in my throat. He was my friend, my best friend with whom I shared my thoughts and feelings. He was dear to me. How beautiful was our friendship, so innocent and so idealistic. "I am sorry," I said. I can't leave my family and run away. My family would not let me go. I am too young to make my own decisions." He did not stay long because they told him to come back quickly since they had to leave right away. "Good bye Lonka," he said softly. "Take care of yourself." We shook hands and he kissed me on the cheek and we departed. I went home, walking slowly. I was so sad and I felt like crying. At that time, I didn't know that I would never see him again. Bronek left Krakow on the same day with his family. Not only his family ran away to the Russian occupied part of Polish territory, but also hundreds or maybe thousands of Jews did the same and tried to get away from the German occupied areas into the Russian held areas. Also, my family had a plan to run away. We even hired a wagon with a horse, but at the last minute, my family changed their mind and we stayed in Krakow. There were many casualties while escaping to the Russian areas. Travelers on the road were bombed and there were many unexploded bombs on the roads, making driving very dangerous. Many were also caught while crossing the borders. However, many others succeeded in crossing the borders.

My life and the life of all Jewish children of school age were filled with boredom and emptiness. After a short period of being open, the schools were closed. There was nothing to do. Some tried to take private lessons to continue schooling, but poor children could not afford this luxury and tried to find something to do or walked the streets with friends. Even walking the

streets was not safe, especially for religious, bearded Jews. They were often the targets of vicious German soldiers.

One day, I was walking in the street and I noticed a crowd of people standing and heartily laughing. I was wondering what is going on that people were having so much fun. Though I always was afraid of crowds, curiosity got hold of me. I approached the crowd and looked around. The picture that I saw was shocking. There was an old orthodox Jew. He was crying and tears flowing down his pale face. He had fear in his eyes and trembling hands. A young German soldier was cutting the hair of his beard, rather pulling out his hair. The Poles gathered, laughed and enjoyed themselves. How disgusting and shameful was this view of Poles taking pleasure in the suffering of an old, helpless Jew. I felt so miserable, furious, and powerless. How disappointed I was when among the laughing Poles I noticed the superintendent of the house where we lived. How could he behave in this way? A man who got so many favors from Jewish tenants. Every holiday he got many gifts and money from them. He pretended to be so friendly, but obviously he disliked Jews, since he enjoyed seeing how this poor, old man was tortured. This experience taught me that one should not trust anyone without reservation. It was also my first lesson of the dark side of human nature. What the German did to the old man was not surprising because every day they committed brutal acts. But I was disappointed and saddened by the behavior of Poles, who were our neighbors, with whom we were friends and who had the same enemy as we - the Germans.

Shortly after this bad experience, I lived through a dreadful event. One day, the Germans closed the streets where Jews lived. An order was announced that no one could leave the house. Anyone disobeying this order would be killed. Understandably, we were scared to death. We did not know what was going on or what would happen to us. The Germans went from one apartment to another to inspect. They confiscated valuable things - gold, silver, money and furs. They were especially looking for radios. It was

punishable to have a radio. Not many people had radios, but we had a radio. We hid it and were worried that the Germans might find it. Tensely, we waited for the Germans to come and when they came to our apartment, it was two tall Germans with stern and unfriendly faces. We stood frightened and motionless. I looked at my poor mother. Her face was pale and my heart was aching. They went from one room to the next. They opened closets and drawers, searching through clothes and grabbing everything they liked. Luckily they did not find the radio. They did not say any word when they came and they did not say any word when they left. It was as if we did not exist at all. They left, but we were still trembling from fear and it took a long while to recover from the shock of this invasion. We were lucky because other Jews were abused and several Jews were even killed during this action.

I lost my mother. Her death came suddenly. Her heart gave in. I could not believe it. It was as if I were living in a bad dream from which I would awaken, but this was not a dream, this was reality. The pain was so great, almost unbearable. My depression was also great. I could not sleep nor eat. I remember sitting at the river Vistula, which was close to our house, oblivious to the surroundings. I was lost in my sorrow. The tears were flowing down my face. I did not notice that someone was approaching. When I heard a voice, I lifted my head and I saw an old man standing in front of me. He had deep eyes. 'Why are you crying child?' he asked me. I instinctively trusted him. I opened my heart to him. I told him about my pain, about my loss. He was listening without interrupting me. When I finished, he said: "Cry my child, don't be ashamed of your tears. Remember, that only time will heal your pain. Be strong my child and God bless you." He touched my head and left. He was right only time could cease my pain.

Life for the Jews under German occupation was miserable, marked with various restrictions, brutal treatment and sporadic acts of violence. Beatings of Jews and cutting the beards of religious Jews were daily games for

young German soldiers. Catching Jews for forced labor or killing Jews at random was ongoing and took place on the streets of our city making Jews uneasy while walking. Nobody could predict what could happen to him or her. Despite the cruel and harsh circumstances, Jews carried out their daily life in a normal way concerned with small, trivial matters. They worked, ate, slept, married and died from natural causes and even children were born. To stay alive and sane one had to be strong and resist the aim of the enemy to break us physically and mentally. Our behavior was the expression of our inner strength and strong will to survive. Through this were we able to function as normal people.

Systematically, day-by-day, the German authority in Krakow carried out new restrictions to make the life of the Jews more difficult. Jews were removed from nice apartments and Germans moved in. Properties and valuables were confiscated. The Jews were thrown out from their businesses and Ukrainians or Germans began operating them. The Jews were forced to bring all their valuables to the proper assigned places. Hiding valuables was forbidden and punished by death. People fully realized how serious and dangerous it would be not to obey the German orders. The majority of Jews gave in and obeyed the orders issued by the German administration. They did not want to take a rather a risky chance to hide the valuables. One could see long lines of Jews waiting to deliver their valuable possessions to the authorities. There were some who did not obey the order and hid their valuables. There are always some individuals who have the courage to fight back even though they realize how risky it may be. There were young boys and girls who joined underground groups, which were engaged in sabotage. How brave they were.

Life was going on. People tried to lead a normal life despite their hardships and their uncertain future. Did they have any other choice? In order to survive, one had to endure deprivation and degradation. Jews prayed to God and hoped that by some miracle they would be saved. People made

attempts to do everything in order to escape the depressing reality, pushing away pessimistic thoughts. It was not easy, but it was the only way to prevent breaking down.

The children also ignored the harsh conditions to which they were exposed in their young lives. Even the youngest children, who could not understand what was going on, sensed that something was not right. The children, like the adults, tried to deal with the existing situation, but in their own way. They lived in a world of fantasy and dreams, where everything has a good ending. At the same time, unconsciously they matured very fast.

It was true that after closing the schools, we were bored and we lost ground academically, but it did not take long to get used to staying home and finding something to do. Of course there were children who were glad not to go to school because they did not like school. We were meeting friends, we were playing games, reading books and taking walks. We even went to the park, although it was not completely safe. We laughed, because it made us feel better. Some friends had to help their parents in their households without regard to their young age because Jews could not employ any Polish servants. Peasants were very poor and young girls from villages were happy to have a job in a Jewish home, where they were treated well and had an easier life than if they were working in the fields. I had older siblings so I did not have to do anything at home and I was free all day to do whatever I wanted.

For a while life was quiet and there were not any more changes for the worse. The Germans let the people get used to this state of existence before introducing new restrictions. This was the method they applied to give the Jews a false impression that things would not be so terrible after all. The Jews were attending to their daily affairs and were busy with their daily routines.

When watching people walking on the street, one could recognize right away who was Jewish because on their arms, they wore bands emblazoned with the

Star of David. Jews were wearing these Star of David bands to distinguish them from the rest of the Polish population. Now the Germans could easily spot a Jew on the street and avoid making any mistakes. When looking for Jews to abuse, the armbands gave the Germans a way to recognize them. Without the bands, the Germans could not distinguish who was Jewish from who was Polish. To them they all looked alike. By introducing the armbands, the Jews were exposed to an even a greater danger while they walked the streets trying to live day to day.

Those bands were made from plastic or fabric. Some were more expensive and some were cheap. Some were fancy and some were simple. They also had different shapes. Making bands was a big business because the demand was great and the item a necessity.

CHAPTER 6

This quiet period in the life of the Jews of Krakow did not last very long. Soon, new changes took place. The Germans were masters at planning the annihilation of the Jews. It went systematically and step by step. They were not in a hurry and they knew exactly what methods to use to succeed in their goals. They had extensive knowledge of human nature, possibly they employed psychologists who gave them advice on how to fool the people and disguise their true goal of the complete elimination of the Jewish nation. They tried to convince the Jews that by obeying their orders, they did not have anything to fear. They did not implement radical measures right away, but with premeditation, they gradually enforced and enhanced the rules. It was not enough that the Jews had to wear the Star of David bands on their arms. They now decided to put Jews in ghettos to separate them completely from Poles.

They set up a ghetto in Podgorze, which was a section of Krakow located on one side of Vistula (Wisla) River. Because the ghetto in Podgorze was too small to settle all the Jews living in Krakow, only those Jews who got special

permission were allowed to stay in ghetto. The remainder had to leave the city. My family was among those who had to leave Krakow. We got a letter from the authorities that permission to stay in Krakow was denied and we had to depart. We were upset, not knowing at this time that this was a blessing for us. Staying at Podgorze would have meant death for all of us, but in leaving Krakow we obtained a small chance to survive. We decided to go to Debica, a small town where my uncle and his family resided.

My best friend Sydia also left Krakow with her family. She had a brother and a sister. They went to a small town in the vicinity of Krakow. This was a very sad departure. We hugged each other, kissed and with tears in our eyes, said goodbye. We promised to stay in touch, to write to each other letters. How could I know at that moment that I was seeing my dear friend for the last time in my life? My other very close friend Franka, left for Kielce where her sister lived. I never saw her again either. Some of my other friends went to live in the ghetto.

Not being able to remain in Krakow, my family prepared to go to Debica. Soon my sisters and one of my brothers left for Debica. Most of our belongings were left behind in our apartment. They took a few pieces of furniture, some clothes and our personal belongings. They traveled in a wagon pulled by horses during the night and avoiding the main roads and hoping not to be stopped by Germans. It was dangerous to be caught by Germans out on the open roads. Thank God they arrived safely in Debica. My uncle had been informed earlier of our decision to live in Debica so he had rented us an apartment in a little house owned by a tailor.

I was afraid to travel with them in the wagon so I stayed longer in Krakow. I also knew that my brother Leo was staying because he had a girl friend and wanted to be with her. I was sure that he would take care of me. However, my brother disappeared. I was looking and looking for him, but I could not find him. I was left by myself and without any money. I was so

lost that I did not know what to do. I was hungry, it was getting dark and I had no place to sleep. I went to several homes, but no one asked me to stay with them. Tired and hungry, I went to the house of a distant relative. She was so friendly. She let me sleep in her house and she fed me. They were very nice people and very poor, but they shared their scarce food with me.

After several days of looking for my brother, I finally met him walking on the street. I was mad and cried. I said that I wanted to go to Debica right away. My brother bought me some food because I was still very hungry. Since he had decided to prolong his stay in Krakow for several days, he began to look for some Pole to take me to Debica and to my family. Finally, he found a young Pole whose name was Kazik. Kazik agreed to take me by train to Debica. I took the Star of David band off my arm. Accompanied by Kazik, I boarded the train. It was a very dangerous trip for a Jewish girl. I was small, blond with green eyes and regular features. I looked like a Polish girl. But even though my appearance was not so bad, my heart was pounding fast when the conductor asked us to show our tickets. The conductor looked closely at my face to make sure that I was not Jewish. This was a very frightening moment and I felt relieved when he left. Many times when the conductors recognized traveling Jews, they called the German guards. It was a very risky undertaking for escaping Jews to travel by trains. I was lucky and reached Debica without any unfortunate incident. I was so happy to be with my family again.

I had a bad experience staying longer in Krakow and a very scary trip by train. Kazik was a nice young man. My family thanked him for bringing me safely to them and of course, paid him for his trouble and for endangering himself. He did us a great favor. My brother stayed longer in Krakow, but after a while joined us even though his girl friend tried to keep him in Krakow. He made the right decision to come to us.

CHAPTER 7

Our apartment in Debica was very small. It was in the attic and consisted of one small room and an even smaller kitchen where a young woman lived with a little child. She was the daughter-in-law of the owner of the house. In the room where we lived, there was a couch, bed, table, closet, stove and a cabinet. We cooked, ate, slept and washed ourselves in the same room. We managed to do all these things in that one room. We did not complain and we were happy to have this small space for ourselves. The inconveniences did not matter to us. It was important to us that we had a place to live and we were all together.

At the top of the stairs leading to our apartment, one had to lift a wooden plate, which covered the entrance to the attic. In the attic there was a door, which led to our apartment. The owner of the house was a widower with two unmarried daughters and a son, who was married and had a small daughter. Our landlord was a tailor by profession. He was a very pious and religious man. This was a very poor, honest and decent family. The families lived in harmony. We never heard any disagreements between them. The children had great respect for the "old father" and the daughter-in-law was a nice, but quiet woman who got along well with her sisters-in-law. They lived in one little apartment, which was clean. They were an ideal example of a religious and traditional Jewish family. They conducted themselves decently and although they were poor, when they went out they were always dressed cleanly and neatly, so nobody could guess how poor they were. There were many people like them in small Polish towns who were poor, but led a decent life. They raised their children to have respect for their elders, to be honest and to work hard. The Jews were so poor that they could only afford to buy meat for the Sabbath, and had no money to marry off their daughters.

I started a new life in this small town. Of course, I missed the big city with its noise, lights in the streets, big stores, movies and newspapers. Most of all, I missed my friends. It was quiet in this town. There were small houses that were neatly painted and kept very clean inside. Some houses had gardens with flowers. There were not too many trees in the center of the town. Within a short distance of the town's center, the picture changed. In the suburbs there were nicer houses with beautiful gardens and many trees and bushes. During the day, the streets were almost desolate. One could see, from time to time, people passing or children running and playing. The children did not have the beautiful toys and picture books, which children have today. It was a simple life. There were no buses, no cars and no trolley cars. There were small shops with food, clothes, a drugstore, and a grocer for example. One could wonder how the Jews in this small town supported themselves and how they made a living. There were no factories where people could find work. Most people were poor and only a few were better off. And I wondered how people could live in such primitive surroundings. I understood that life was very difficult under German occupation, but before the war, poverty and unemployment was still great. I wondered how young people could live in such a small town not having a theater, museum and all other things, which a big city offered and to which I was accustomed. However, this was not their concern. There were bigger issues. There were no jobs for them or opportunities. They did not have the means to go to high schools or colleges.

Staying longer in the town, I realized one could get used to life in a small town. After a short time, I got adjusted to this new place and I found that there were things, which compensated for the missing big city comforts like fresh air, tranquility and quiet. One could admire the beauty of nature. The sky was so blue and in summertime the smell of the flowers was intoxicating. I enjoyed long walks with friends and exploring my new

surroundings. I met new friends and most of the time I was outside when the weather was nice.

Zen became my best friend. He was a nice and good-looking boy with innocent blue eyes. His father died and the Germans killed his mother. He had one younger brother. Zen used to come to us almost every day. He was lonely, but he was a brave boy who faced hardships with a smile on his face. He was an orphan, and did not have anyone to care about him. He matured very fast. He did not have anyone to protect him so he made his own decisions. He supported himself and he survived. If I compare many of the young people of today to this young boy, I realize how different they are.

Originally, his widowed mother had settled in a small town not far from Debica with her two sons. One day, the Germans gathered all the Jews together from the villages and little towns. They killed many of them on the spot. His mother was murdered then. The remaining Jews were brought to Debica. They were located in primitive wooden barracks built on an empty lot not very far from our house. The standard of living in these barracks was miserable. There was no hot water, no toilets and many people crowded in small rooms. The Germans knew that they would not be staying there for long. Their fate was sealed, but of course they did not know it. Being alive, they hoped that they would stay alive. Zen lived in these barracks with his brother. He was a young kid, but, although he was only a child, he worked on the railroad. The Germans put the youngest children to work. There was no consideration of youth or child labor laws then.

I had another friend named Cesia. She was also from Krakow. She lived with her father, stepmother and stepbrother. Her stepbrother, Milek, was a very quiet and shy teenager. Cesia was not as pretty as my friend Sydia, but she was like an angel. Her sweet smile and her innocent eyes made her face a pleasure to look at. Her relations with her stepmother were cordial and harmonious as were those with her stepbrother. She was very bright, very

intelligent and her dream was to become a doctor and cure people. Her father had a little store in Debica and her stepmother helped him in the store. Cesia helped her in the household. She never complained and always had a smile on her face. I had other friends, but Zen and Cesia were the closest and dearest ones. We met every day and we talked, took walks and shared our feelings. We did not study and we did not read because we did not have any books or newspapers. Also, there was no library. All the news we got was from rumors and from people who worked outside the Jewish neighborhood. At this time, there was not yet a ghetto in this area.

CHAPTER 8

During the first year, life in Debica was uneventful. It was quiet compared to the life we had left. Our town was spared all the troubles that existed in other places. People worked, children played and schools were closed, but children who could afford it hired private teachers to instruct them. People tried to occupy themselves with daily chores and forget about their situation and the uncertainty of the future. Of course, there were all kinds of rumors spreading around. They were frightening rumors, which created tension, fear and skepticism.

We heard often about deportations taking place in other towns, cities, and villages. These rumors were scary. The question was: How could Debica be an exception? How could it not share the fate of other cities and towns? Reason gave us the answer. There was no chance that our town would be more fortunate than other cities, towns and villages. It was only a matter of time. People pushed away this logical conclusion. It seemed that they wanted to lull themselves. They didn't want to accept the rational truth. They preferred to deceive themselves, hoping that Debica, and they too, would somehow escape this fate.

A pessimistic philosopher once said that hope is the mother of fools. Is this correct? One can interpret this in different ways. "Judenrat," a council made up of Jewish leaders, was chosen to work with the German authorities in order to organize matters of the Jewish community. Most of the time, they were busy implementing all the regulations and restrictions formulated by the German administration. They were unable to help or to ease the hardship placed on the Jewish community. Occasionally, the Judenrat succeeded in bribing a German official into helping a Jew in trouble, but that was achievable only in less severe cases. In general, the Judenrat was helpless while watching in despair as the German bureaucrats carried out all their orders with precision and efficiency. In very rare instances, a befriended German would tell them about an upcoming "action," such as the surrounding of a ghetto, the killing some Jews (mostly old people and children) and then deporting the rest to an unknown destination. At this time, people did not know that the final destination of these deported Jews was the concentration camps.

Jewish leaders were helpless and had a terrible task in carrying out German commands. However, they had to obey the orders given by the Germans or otherwise, they would be killed. Some leaders were foolish enough to believe that by cooperation and servitude they were helping the Jewish community. How wrong they were became clearer over time. In a small town, such as Debica, it was easier to come in contact with low ranking German officials in the secret police, which were known as The Gestapo. Through this personal contact and extensive bribery, they managed to receive some information concerning planned actions. This type of information saved many Jewish lives.

One of the responsibilities put on the Judenrat was to deliver a specified number of women and men each day to do manual labor such as cleaning the streets, working on the farms and cleaning the houses of German officials for example. A lot of Germans moved into the town and displaced people from

their homes and occupied them. They were provided with Jewish slaves to clean up after them. In the winter there were other jobs for Jews. Polish winters are severe with a lot of snow so the town needed people to clean the roads to make driving easier for the Germans. The Germans "employed" the Jews to do this job. They had a free slave labor force. Every family had to send one person to shovel the snow off the roads. My sister Eda went to shovel the snow every day. Shoveling snow for many hours was a strenuous job. The winter was harsh with cold penetrating winds. She used to come home completely exhausted with her legs and hands frozen, and her whole body aching not only from the hard work, but also from abuse of the German guards. Once a German soldier told the group in which my sister was working that after they finished the work, every one would be killed. One can only imagine how frightened my sister and the other workers were. They did not know if he wanted only to scare them or if he meant it. They were relieved when, at the end of their work, they were allowed to return home.

The Judenrat was also taxed. More and more money was demanded from the Jewish community. The Judenrat collected money and jewelry to deliver to the German officials. Most people in the town were very poor so the burden was put on the few rich ones. In times of emergency, the Judenrat collected money in a great hurry to ransom jailed Jews. This was a matter of life and death. The Judenrat had its hands full in dealing with all of the problems, which befell the Jewish community. Many times, the Germans came into the Jewish quarter to hunt down Jews, both young and old, and send them to work in different places. Some people managed to escape and hide because one could not predict what the Germans might do to them.

There was in town a "Soldatenhouse" in town. In translation, this was a soldier's house. It was designated only for German soldiers, German police and German officials. It was a combination of a restaurant, coffeehouse, and cabaret, a place where the Germans came to eat, to drink alcohol, to dance and

to socialize. This was a gathering place for the German secret police, the Gestapo, along with high-ranking German officials. It was a place where they could share news from the front and be entertained by showgirls.

Nuns managed the Soldatenheim and Elsa was the head nun, a supervisor responsible for the overall operation of this establishment. An officer from the Wehrmacht was the financial administrator. His name was Walter. He was a decent man who did not belong to the Nazi party. Polish workers did all the manual work. Poles worked in the kitchen, were cooks, cleaned the premises, worked in construction and were the waiters. Mostly women worked in the restaurant. There was a young Polish boy whose name was Mietek. He belonged to the Hitler Jugend organization (the German Youth organization). Mietek claimed that he was of German origin. At the same time, he belonged to the Polish underground. At that time, nobody knew that he was a traitor who delivered the names of underground members to the Germans. He also would go into the forests to track down Jews in hiding and deliver them to the Germans. After the war, he was tried by the Polish underground and killed as a traitor.

The Judenrat used to send Jews to work in Soldatenheim. They didn't work in the kitchen, only in the flower and vegetable gardens. They chopped wood and carried packages for example. Every day, different people were sent to work for several hours. One day my brother Leo was sent with a group of other Jews to the Soldatenheim. Walter took a liking to my brother and chose him from the entire group for a steady job in the Soldatenheim. My brother was a young boy. He was handsome and very handy. He was a very good worker. He was good with tools and could do almost anything. It was very important that he also spoke German. Especially Elsa, who was a good-hearted person and not a Nazi sympathizer, treated him very well by the nuns and. Understandably, the Polish workers were jealous of him and could not understand that the Germans respected my brother, who was a Jew, more than them. They respected

him because he was an intelligent boy who spoke German, which was the language taught in our Gymnasium (high school). The village women were not educated.

For Leo, this was a very good job because he worked in one place while others were sent to a different place each day. He also had food and he was able to bring home bread, meat and honey (this was an artificial kind of honey, which the Germans ate in place of butter). It was a great help to us when considering that our income was almost non-existent. My older brother was teaching small children who could not go to school. As I mentioned before, all the schools for Jewish children were closed. Teaching at home was illegal and severely punishable.

We had a small income. The parents of the children did not pay too well because most of the people were poor. The children were so eager to learn. Nice, good children who matured too fast and understood the problems that their parents faced. My brother did not have books so he taught from memory. I picture the children all in my memory. Though I don't remember their names, I do remember their dark eyes that were so beautiful, but with such sadness in their eyes, which remained even when they laughed. They were poor, beautiful children who did not know that their life would be so short and would end so tragically. Later, my brother Leo was able to get work for my two sisters in Soldatenheim. He asked the supervisor Elsa about hiring my sisters and she agreed. One of my sisters, Eda, worked in the kitchen, and the other, Anna, worked in the gardens. They were also treated well. They worked only for a short period of time. My brother worked there almost to the end of the existence of the ghetto in Debica.

It was unusual that a Jew worked in such an establishment; the place where the highest-ranking German officials frequently used for wild parties with heavy drinking while congratulating each other on a "good job" was done on the town's Jews. During the "actions" in small towns and villages in the vicinity of Debica, dancing and drinking with prostitutes went on almost all

night. One could only wonder what was going on in their minds; only miles away and only hours ago they had been shooting small children and elderly people.

CHAPTER 9

For a while, Debica did not experience any transport. However, beneath the surface, ominous currents were running. The Germans slowly, but surely, carried out their satanic objectives to erase Jews from the face of the planet. Terrible news came from different places, which chilled the blood in our veins. Jews in small towns and villages were gathered in one place while the sick; the old and the children were killed on the spot. They did not bother to evacuate them. The remaining able bodies were transported to an unknown location. They were packed in wagons, like cattle. They were without food or water and they suffered intensely in these inhuman conditions.

Nobody knew what happened to them. There were more and more transports of Jews. The Germans tried to conceal the truth of where they took them. They spread fake rumors that these Jews were re-settled and that they had built houses for them and that they were working. Many times, Germans approached Jews and started friendly conversations. During these conversations they said they just visited such a place for the Jews. They said that families were kept together, that they lived in good conditions and seemed to be satisfied. They also mentioned that there were doctors who took care of them. They assured them that this arrangement was only temporary, for security reasons. After the war, the people would be allowed to return to their homes. What kind of fool could believe this?

Meanwhile, more and more towns and cities were Juden frei, which translates as "clean of Jews." I remember the names of the first towns to be left without any Jews: Myslenice, Sedziszow and Ropczyne were among them.

It was a sad day for the Jews in Debica when we saw the Jews of Lodz marching through our streets. How heartbreaking was this view of poor Jews, who were taken to a so-called transit camp in Pustkow. This camp was located in the vicinity of Debica. It was a pitiful picture of wretched human beings with ragged faces, skinny, bent figures and shabby clothes. It was a picture of human misery, a picture of human degradation. One could see fear and despair in their eyes. Even young people looked old and withdrawn. It was painful to look at them and not be able to help them. We couldn't even give them anything to eat or drink. When I came home I cried and cried and could not stop. I thought to myself, "will this be our fate?" I could not sleep that night. I tossed from one side to another and when I finally fell asleep, I had nightmares.

Pustkow was a temporary camp where Jews were brought from small towns, villages and cities for a short time. My brother's friend Leos worked in this place as a medical assistant. He was not sent to Pustkow, but voluntarily applied for this job. He thought that this would save him from being sent to a camp. He calculated that he would be more secure and have a better job. He did not realize that this was not a working camp, but some kind of concentration camp. When he used to come home and when he had a day off, he told us about the inhuman conditions in this camp. Jews were shot on the spot for the smallest things. There was no serious medical care and people were only treated for small medical problems. People that were sick were killed because the guards did not want to be bothered with ill people. The Jews worked hard, but they did not get enough food. They did not keep Jews here for very long because they sent them to bigger concentration camps, which had specialized methods of mass murder, such as Oswiecim and Treblinka. Only the strong young people survived Pustkow. When one group left, another group arrived. After a time Pustkow was liquidated and my brother's friend was sent to Oswiecim.

It was only a matter of time before our town would share the fate of the others. The signs were ominous. The Jews in the town were worried, but tried to push away the sad predictions. Days passed and weeks passed, when a disastrous event took place. One of the Jewish leaders was told by a sympathetic German (maybe he was bribed) that the next day there would be an "action" in our town. This terrible news spread fast. As usual, some people believed and some did not. Often, there were rumors, which turned out to be false, but this time this was not the case. Even those people who believed in the bad news knew that there was no place to hide and no place to run away considering the animosity of Polish population who, many times, helped the Germans in their job by catching or denouncing Jews.

My family believed in the rumors and decided to hide in Soldatenheim, in the place where my brother worked. All of us could not leave the ghetto at the same time. This was an ingenious plan, but some risk was involved. First I went out with my older brother Sam. We took off our Star of David armbands so as not to be recognized by the Poles as Jews. We walked until we reached Soldatenheim. Luckily no one on the streets stopped us. Gentiles in this town did not know us because we were from Krakow. When we came to the Soldatenheim, we went to the back of the garden and went inside through an opening in the gates. My brother Leo was waiting in the garden. First he led Sam to a cellar where he hid him. After this he returned to take me to the same hiding place. At this moment Walter, the German administrator, unexpectedly appeared from nowhere and noticed me standing there. My brother had no choice but to introduce me to him. He said, "It is my youngest sister". To our relief he did not ask what I was doing there. It was hard to know if he suspected that I was going to hide myself there. When he left, my brother took me to the cellar. This cellar was never used and no one ever went there, so it was a safe place to hide. Inside, it was dark, damp and cold. It was also smelly, but we were happy to be there. We were impatiently

waiting for our two sisters to join us. We were waiting and waiting and they did not arrive. We started to worry about what had happened. Finally, after some hours of harrowing and torturous thoughts, they arrived. Their leaving the ghetto was not simple. It was more complicated than ours and could have had a fatal ending. Shortly after our departure, the Germans surrounded the ghetto and no one was able to escape. My poor sisters were stuck inside and from the safety of their hiding place, witnessed the tragic events.

All of the town's Jews were assembled in one place along with many other Jews who were brought from other towns and villages in the vicinity. There was a tumult and confusion, with people screaming and crying. People were chased out from their houses and loud announcements from the installed megaphones ordered people to leave their houses under the threat of death. My sisters took a very courageous step in escaping to a store, which was attached to a Polish store outside the surrounded Jewish section of city. The Germans did not know that there was an exit to the gentile side. The owner of this store did not notice them entering the store. Once in the store, they mingled with other customers. They were elegantly dressed and, because they were new in town, nobody recognized them as Jewish. They went out of the store and walked to the Soldatenheim. Because they had worked there for some time, they knew the way and the Soldatenheim was only a short distance from our house. The fear of being recognized by a passerby as an escaping Jew (everyone in the town knew that the Jewish section was besieged by the Germans) made this short trip feel as if it lasted forever. When I left the ghetto, the situation was different, because the Germans did not besiege the ghetto at that time and the Gentiles did not know that it soon would be.

When my sisters came my brother could not take them right away to our hiding place. Polish workers were around and this could be very dangerous since they knew my sisters. My brother hid them in a storage room where they stayed for several hours. It was a small room stuffed with brooms, brushes

and all kinds of cleaning material. They had to stand all the time since there was no space to sit down. They gladly suffered the inconvenience because they were glad to not be in the ghetto. After their arrival, my brother came to us to tell us the good news. One could only imagine how happy we were hearing this good news.

When it was getting dark and no one was around, my brother took them to the cellar. We were so glad they were here with us in this dark and stuffy place with a little window. We sat on the cold, damp ground. We were too scared to utter a word. Someone might hear a noise and be suspicious about what caused it. In the middle of the night, we were awakened from our nightmares by the sounds of the German language. We wondered what it could be. We looked through the small window and the picture that we saw was so frightening that our hearts started to beat so fast we wanted to jump out from our bodies. A group of Germans were approaching our hiding place. Our first thought was that someone had seen us and denounced us to the Germans and now they are coming to get us, to kill us or in the best case, to take us away to the ghetto. With every passing moment our despair grew and we were sure this was the end of our struggle to survive. Their footsteps were getting closer and closer. They stopped right in front of the cellar.

Observing their behavior we realized that we had made a mistake. They did not come to get us as we imagined. They took their rifles from their shoulders and they stacked them neatly on lawn in the front of our hiding place. They were very noisy. They were loudly talking and laughing and they went inside the Soldatenheim. We breathed easier, but it took us a while to calm down after this frightening experience.

It turned out the Germans had come to enjoy themselves. All night they partied with women. One could hear loud voices, laughing, dancing and singing. Presumably heavy drinking was going on. It was a strange, farcical and ridiculous situation while at the same time a macabre one. Picture this

upstairs: German SS men having a party without knowing that below them, in the cellar, five Jews were hiding and listening to sounds of the ongoing party. One could easily imagine what would happen if they discovered our existence. We did not sleep all night for two reasons. The first was that we were too nervous and secondly because of the loud noise. Finally, their party came to an end and they came downstairs to take their rifles. They must have been very drunk because it took them longer to place the rifles on their shoulders and they did not march as briskly as when they arrived. After their departure, we felt much better. We finally fell asleep.

For three days, the German Gestapo tortured the Jews in the ghetto section of Debica. All the Jews were assembled on a huge lot of land. The Germans played with the Jews as a cat plays with a mouse, before swallowing it. German officials were seated and every Jew had to come to the table with his or her identification card. Those who got a stamp could remain in town. Those who did not were taken away for transportation to an unknown location. Jews did not know that they were headed to concentration camps. They could not take anything with them. What criteria they used when deciding who got a stamp was not easy to guess. Of course, age and appearance of the person played some role. However, many times young and beautiful girls were killed on spot along with young healthy men. Maybe they did not like their looks being so handsome or wondered why some Jewish girls were so beautiful. It was a kind of Yom Kippur, a day of judgment with the Germans playing God as they decided who would live and who would die. Two young girls that were very pretty approached the table and the German official did not put a stamp on their identification cards. With tears in their eyes they begged him to let them stay. One of the girls spoke German fluently, she had grown up in a town named Bielsko where many Germans lived, and she was taught in German school. The German did not say anything. He just took out his gun and killed both of them on the spot.

Without any expression on his stony face, he put his gun back into the holster and started to put stamps over I.D. cards. Every Jew had an identification card with their fingerprints on it, which they had been issued at the beginning of the German occupation. The Poles also had identification cards, but they looked different. Almost all of the Jews that were brought to our ghetto from other places were immediately shipped out in wagons for transportation to the camps. Many who were old and infirm or very young were killed without regard. The Germans had no use for them and they were disposed of as if they were trash.

Before my sisters escaped from the ghetto, they witnessed some of the most horrible scenes imaginable. They saw Jews brought from other towns and small villages. They were young and old, men and women alike, with sad faces and immense fear and horror in their eyes. All were dragged to the assembly place to join the Debica Jews, to share their fate. All of their belongings were confiscated, valuable or not. The image of old women and men forced to sit on the ground was engraved in their memory forever. It was heartbreaking to look at their wrinkled faces, which held such emptiness. They did not expect that in a short time their lives would end. Why couldn't they die of natural causes surrounded by loved ones?

The remaining Jews from the other towns and villages who were lucky enough to get a stamp to stay in the ghetto were placed in wooden barracks, which had been built for them. Families were separated. Some members were taken away, some were killed and some were allowed to stay. Those who stayed in the ghetto lamented and cried for those who were taken from them.

We stayed in our hiding place waiting impatiently for the end of the "action." We were worried about what was happening to our family and friends. During our time in the cellar, we had one more dreadful experience. My brother was working as usual, performing his daily duties. It was dinner, a very busy time in Soldatenheim, and there were many Germans consuming their

dinners and conversing. One of the Germans, a high-ranking official, noticed my brother working. He was surprised that he was working and not in the ghetto during this time of "action." Right away this German went to the head nun, Elsa, who was the manager of this establishment, to complain. Very angry he asked, "Why is this Jew working today? He should be with other Jews in the ghetto now." He ordered her to send him there right away. Hearing these harsh words and an order, which could not be disobeyed, she got very upset. Her mind was working quickly. What could she do to prevent this? She was in a dilemma. How could she oppose the orders, and how could she allow Leo, whom she liked so much, to be sent to the ghetto. She was not so naïve that she did not know what it meant to be in the ghetto during such an "action."

One could understand my brother's despair when Elsa told him about her conversation with the Gestapo official. My brother was frustrated and helpless. He didn't know what to do. In this moment he did not think about himself as much as about us hidden in the cellar. He feverishly was thinking about trying to solve this impasse. He asked himself, "Who will feed my sisters and brother? Who will tell them when the action is over? How can they possibly leave the cellar on their own?" He had no answers. Being sure that he was going to the ghetto he made a very risky decision. Had he any other choice? No.

Mietek, the young boy who worked with my brother, liked him even though he disliked Jews. One could even describe his feelings for Jews as hatred. He took pleasure in catching hiding Jews and delivering them to the Gestapo for a reward. Of course, my brother did not know about this at that time.

He only knew that he belonged to the Hitler Jugend. My brother must have not been in his right mind when he told this young boy about us hiding in the cellar. He asked him to take care of us, in case he had to go the ghetto. It was true that my brother was friendly with him, but how could he trust him. He was a young Nazi. Maybe my brother being in despair was drinking and his mind was not functioning clearly. This is why he did not realize that he was putting us in grave danger.

Elsa worked out a plan to reverse the order given by this Gestapo official in the meantime. She was determined to do everything in her power prevent my brother being sent back to the ghetto during this time of "action." She wanted to save my brother. She was a German and was patriotic. She was like Walter. She went to the commander of the Gestapo, who had a higher position than the officer who gave her the order to send my brother back. She knew the commander very well, as he often frequented in Soldateheim and she was on good terms with him. She decided to go to him and to talk with him about my brother. She took several bottles of the most expensive liquor to give him as a "present." During their conversation, she mentioned my brother and nonchalantly asked if he could give his permission for my brother to continue working at the Soldateheim. She stressed that my brother was indispensable and essential to the overall operation of Soldatenheim. She said that she did not have anybody to replace him and without him the service would be disrupted. The commander wanted to please her and he knew that could count on some favors from her in return. In the end, he agreed to her request. He knew that even if the Germans did not get Leo today, there would be another day for sure. Thus he could do her this favor without fear that he was betraying his Nazi ideology. Elsa was so glad that she succeeded in her plan to save my brother. She returned with a light heart to tell my brother the good news.

The news was very good and made us very happy. Now we had different worries. How could we be sure that the young "Hitler Jugend" would not denounce us to the Germans? Was this young boy reliable to keep such a secret? We were very uneasy, but our worries were put aside when a day passed and nothing happened. To the contrary, Mietek brought us food and made us feel better. He used to sing that everything was going well when he was passing the cellar during the day. Now my brother could relax and work hard to satisfy his boss.

After this tense time in hiding, the time came when we could leave the cellar. The "action" was completed and we had to return to the ghetto. With heavy hearts, not knowing what we would find there, we returned. Leaving the cellar was not completely without risk. If the personnel working there, the Germans coming there or the Poles passing the Soldatenheim, noticed us we could still be turned in. We left our hiding place one by one. My brother kept watch to make sure no one was around. We walked out without being seen. We were very alert while walking the streets without our Star of David armbands. We were lucky that nobody stopped us and safely we entered the ghetto. My brother Sam looked more Jewish than we did so Mietek, who wore an armband with a swastika (emblem of the Nazis), proposed that he would accompany my brother to the ghetto. We liked that idea very much. Mietek escorted him safely to the gate of the ghetto. Sometimes it is hard to understand human behavior. How can one explain Mietek's behavior towards us? His help stood in sharp contrast with his hostile actions against the Jews further exemplified by his "hunting" trips.

We returned to the ghetto. This was not the same place we had left when we went into hiding. It was like a ghost town. No people were walking the streets. Stores were closed. There was complete stillness. The population had been decimated. Almost all of the old people had been killed or taken away. Families were separated. Almost every family lost someone. People were still

in complete shock and sat at home mourning their beloved ones. Sadness, despair and grief hung over the whole town like dark clouds after a storm. The storm hit the ghetto with such a devastating force - destroying lives and burning out all hope.

My close family at this time was spared. We did not suffer any loss. My uncle, aunt, and their three children (Hanka, Shmuel and David) were left. I lost my best friend Cesia, who was deported with her stepmother and father. Only her stepbrother was left. I cried when her stepbrother told me. Some members of my distant family were sent away. They were my grandmother's cousin, a highly religious man and a great talmudic scholar, his wife, a gentle woman and their son, a talented young boy who played the violin like a professional, though he never took music lessons. Also deported was their daughter, her husband, a handsome man, tall, blue eyed , blond and their child.

CHAPTER 10

After a period of mourning, people started to come out from their homes. They had literally aged over night. They met other Jews, shared their grief and little by little, their tears dried out, but the pain remained. People started to go on with their lives. The instinct to survive took hold and the will to survive overcame their depression and loss. To live they had to eat, to eat they had to have money to buy food and to have money they had to work. In order to exist, people had to begin to perform their daily routines.

For a span of time, the Germans did not bother the ghetto. It was quiet and the Jews attended to their daily affairs. From time to time we received bad news about other places, and were concerned about our own uncertain future.

People were not laughing. One could see that they were troubled. As robots, they performed their daily duties. Life in the ghetto was not the

same as when we arrived after leaving Krakow. People were more alive, more active and had hope then. The children made noise playing outside. Now everything was subdued. There was a gloom hanging over everything. The pain of losing relatives still lingered. Even the sky looked dim in the daylight.

At this time, there was nothing extraordinary going on. This event-less existence ended when new repressions and restrictions were put on the Debica ghetto. The Germans decided to close the ghetto completely. People who still lived outside the ghetto had to leave their homes and move permanently into the ghetto. There was not too much space and people lived in crowded rooms with several families in one apartment. The ghetto was surrounded with barbed wire to prevent Jews from escaping. They installed a gate where policemen checked all the pass cards of people leaving the ghetto for work outside in the gentile part of the city. They also checked all the packages of people coming back from work. They confiscated a lot of things brought back by the workers. Some people knew how to bribe the policeman to smuggle in food. The conditions of life drastically worsened and existence became harsh. Food was scarce and very expensive. The hygienic conditions were deplorable. There were no doctors. An epidemic of typhus broke out and there were some casualties. We tried to keep ourselves clean, though it was not easy. We were five people living in one room. This room served as our kitchen, bathroom, dining room, living room and our bedroom. The toilet was an outhouse in the garden. Hot water was heated on the stove. We burned wood to heat the room. My youngest cousin, a blond sweet boy, used to come frequently to bring us pieces of chopped wood.

My brother still worked in Soldatenheim and every day he managed to bring us food. He had a small bag in which he carried food for us - meat, bread and honey. Of course, the manager saw him leaving with a bag, but she never said anything. She certainly knew that he was taking some food home. We were lucky to have enough to eat. We even used to sell some bread covered

with honey. There was a shortage of bread so people were glad to get the bread and we were glad to get some money. We used the money to buy other products.

Our financial situation got worse when my brother lost his job. My brother was the only Jew employed in such a place where sabotage could be easily carried out. Elsa, received orders from the Gestapo that no Jew could work in Soldatenheim. She had no choice but to fire him. She was so sorry, having tears in her eyes when she said good-bye and wished him good luck. She provided him with some food and a big bag of potatoes. This was a most precious gift and lasted a long time. We had no more bread, no more honey and no more meat. This was all that Elsa could do for him. His farewell with Walter, the financial administrator of Soldatenheim, was also sad. Walter even suggested that he could give my brother a gun and a German soldier's uniform so he could try to cross the border on the Russian side. This undertaking could be very risky and very difficult to accomplish. The thought was kind, but my brother did not want to abandon us. He thanked him very much for his offer. Walter knew what the Jews could expect from the Nazis and he had wanted to help my brother to save himself.

CHAPTER 11

Each day, more and more places were Juden "frie" free of Jews. We had relatives who lived in the east of Poland. My aunt sent us a package with food and inside there was a letter. She wrote us that day and night without rest, transports carried Jews to the West. My uncle received some very bad news concerning his daughter and her family. They lived in Tarnow City. There was an "action" and her husband was taken away. She went to the Germans, begging them not to take her husband. They shot her and her little boy on the spot. That news almost killed my uncle, a gentle man, who suffered from stomach problems. This was a great tragedy for the whole family. We

lost a beautiful cousin and a little, innocent child. Those were the first casualties for our immediate family. What would be the fate of the remaining members of our family? This we did not know.

We had a large family with uncles, aunts, cousins and other relatives living in different cities and towns. Our grandfather named Simcha, an old man, lived in Tarnow City. It was the same city where my cousin was shot and killed. A day before the "action," he died of natural causes. He was lucky. He was a great Talmudic scholar and known in Jewish religious circles. Hundreds of Jews took part in his funeral. He knew that he was dying, but he was able to write a letter to us before his death. The last words of his letter were illegible. The letter was sent to us through a relative. In this letter, he blessed us and wished for our survival. He also begged us to promise that if we survived the war, my brothers would not marry out of our faith. He was a prophet and predicted that after the war there would be inter-faith marriages. He had an extraordinary personality. He lost his wife at a very young age, but he never remarried because he loved his wife so much. He raised his four children, one of whom was my father, by himself. When he retired, he devoted his life to poor Jews. He used to take homeless men to his house and cook for them and help them in every possible way. He lived as a saint lives. He died as a saint dies avoiding a harsh death at the hands of the barbarians.

The German method was to create the illusion that they would not harm anyone. They indicated that their intention was to resettle Jews and help rebuild their lives. They wanted to give people the false hope that if they had a profession or a trade, they didn't have to fear and could keep working for the German cause. Many people wanted to believe and thus did not look too deeply behind these lies.

Life in ghetto was gloomy and morose. The mood of the people worsened each day. People listened to the rumors and asked one another if there was

any good news. The news, if there was any, was as bad as it they could be. People were anxiously waiting for the war to end. This seemed far way. The Germans were winning and the German army was strong and advancing day by day. It seemed at that time that Germany was invincible. The prospects for a quick end to the war were very slim.

CHAPTER 12

My friend Zenek lived in the barracks built for Jews from other places who remained after the "action." When I used to go to visit him, I had an opportunity to observe the life of the people living in the barracks. Our life was a paradise in comparison to the conditions of life in the barracks. We lived in one room, but we were by ourselves and we had privacy. We had food and wood to heat our apartment with. Our room was kept clean.

The barracks were overcrowded. The odor was sickening and the noise deafening. There were little cells all next to each other, no privacy. The wooden walls were so thin that one could hear the conversation in the neighboring cell. It was a noisy and depressing place. The Germans knew very well that this was a temporary arrangement. Keeping people in such deplorable conditions for a long time could cause contagious diseases to break out. This was not in their best interest as any illness could also affect them.

Zenek and his younger brother lived in one of those small cells. They tried their best to manage. Their mother had been transported. Zenek and I were good friends. He visited us almost every day, not wanting to stay in the barracks any more than necessary. We talked a lot about life and wondered why this was happening to us. We also made plans for the future, though we didn't really believe that there would be a future for any of us. We talked about Krakow, school, and our friends. Our friendship was so innocent and so beautiful.

In my life, Zenek took the place of Cesia, who had been transported. I missed her very much and wondered what was happening to her angelic soul. She did not have a bad bone in her whole body. But what horrors was she being subjected to? I was also thinking about my many friends from Krakow. I wondered what had become of them and if they were even still alive.

One day I got a surprise. It was a letter from Sydia, my dear friend. She was the green eyed, beautiful girl. She wrote in her letter that she was living in a small town with her parents and siblings. The same tragic events had occurred in their town: "actions," killings and transports of Jews for resettlement. There was a time when she considered coming to us, but could not leave her family. I was so happy that she was still alive. This was the last time I ever heard from her.

There were some young children in the ghetto. Some families went into hiding at the same time we did so a small number of children did survive. It was painful to look at them. It was hard for us, but for children it was a truly a terrible experience to be hidden during an "action." The very young were given sleeping pills so they couldn't cry out and alert the Germans, as they went on their house-to-house search for hidden Jews.

The children played games, but even when they were playing, there was sadness over them. They did not understand the seriousness of the situation, but they felt that something was wrong when they looked at their parents' troubled faces.

Despite the grave situation, school age children still attended lessons in basic subjects taught by my brother Sam. They were eager to learn. Did they know that their fate was sealed, that they would never grow up? Did my beautiful cousin, who came every day to study with my brother, know that his dreams to go to college when the war was over would never be realized? How very bright were these young boys and girls. How very intelligent were these children, with the sad dark eyes. How could someone imagine the unimaginable?

CHAPTER 13

Life in the ghetto worsened after it was sealed. We were confined to a small space. There was no more walking in the woods to escape to the beauty of the trees, the flowers, and smell of the grass. Everything was so depressing. Only the people who worked outside could leave the ghetto, but they could not walk freely where they wanted to. They could only go to work and return straight home.

Even walking in the ghetto was not completely safe. From time to time, the Germans made escapades into the ghetto to catch Jews and send them to work in different places where there was a need for slave workers. They sent them to clean the homes of German officials or to work on farms for example. Being caught could also be dangerous because one couldn't predict what would happen. One could be sent away or just killed on the spot. There were no laws protecting Jews. Any time the Germans came into the ghetto, people ran away. However, they did not always manage to avoid of being caught.

I had several unnerving experiences. My sister sent me to buy something in a store. I noticed that people were running, but thought nothing of it. At first, I did not see Germans, but when I noticed them it was too late to escape. A tall German approached me and told me to join a group of Jews that he caught. Suddenly, the German started to run after a young man and I took advantage of this situation. Instead of joining the group, I ran into a store and the owner of the store hid me and some other people in the cellar. For an hour or longer, I was sitting in the dark cellar trembling from fear. When the Germans left the ghetto, we got out from the cellar. When I came home, I was still very frightened. My family did not know anything about what had occurred in the street. They wondered why it took me so long to buy something in the store, which was not far from our apartment. This time I was lucky,

but another time while I was walking on the street, I was caught and they took me with a group of Jews. Most of them were very young and children because most adults were working outside the ghetto. They took us to a military establishment and told me to wash the floors. I had never washed a floor before this and I was worried about how well I was going to do this job. I was thinking that if I could not do a good job they would kill me. My sister Ana found out that I was caught and hurried over to the military establishment and asked permission to wash the floors in my place. They agreed and I was glad to be free to go home.

I got an easy job sweeping the streets. In this small town, there were no sanitation cars to clean streets. Hired people who, with brooms and shovels, swept the streets everyday. Now the Germans delivered Jewish slave workers to the city who did the same job free of charge. Jewish youngsters were sent to clean the streets because they considered this job too easy for the adults. It was not too hard to sweep the streets. Only the dust bothered me. I even enjoyed being outside the ghetto for several hours a day. I saw children playing and laughing. These children had happy faces. I saw men and women walking without Star of David armbands, who freely could shop in stores. I envied them. I was thinking "why us? For what sins were we punished?" I did not find any answer. It seemed to me that the sun here was brighter than the sun in the ghetto. Was this possible that the sun got dim and gloomy inside the walls of the ghetto from all the human suffering and misery?

My supervisor was a middle-aged man with bulgy eyes, a red nose and a big round belly. He was a drunkard. This was the reason he had a red nose. He was always holding a bottle of whisky or Polish vodka while he was watching us. He also made some remarks towards us from time to time. He thought that he was a very important man because he now had slave workers to do his bidding. He obviously liked me because very often he took the brush from me and helped me. He gave me breaks so I could rest. I could not say that he

was a bad man because he didn't abuse any of us. It was fun for me to observe the activity on the street. This was the main street and it was the busiest compared with the side streets, which were almost empty.

One day something unusual happened. I noticed a young German soldier leaving a bakery and holding a loaf of bread in his hand. This bakery was only for Germans. When the soldier approached me, I was startled and panicked. My instincts said, "run," but my reason said, "You are crazy." Frozen from fear, I stood still. He smiled and said to me, "Take this bread back to the ghetto," I visibly relaxed. He left in a rush not waiting to hear my thank-you. Maybe he was afraid that some other German would see him giving bread to a Jewish girl and label him a sympathizer. That would not only be embarrassing for him, but could have more serious consequences. In a time when brutality and bestiality had an upper hand, this gesture of sympathy was most heart warming. It gave us some hope that maybe goodness would eventually overcome the evil of human degradation. My drunken boss was also surprised when he saw the German soldier giving a loaf of bread to me, a Jewish girl. It was beyond his comprehension. How could this be? He was used to seeing Jews being oppressed and being treated like a piece of dirt, not with compassion and kindness that this soldier chose to show me.

When I came home and told my family what had happened to me, they only shook their heads in disbelief. This story was repeated over and over by our neighbors and each time the content changed. Even though the facts changed, the gesture of kindness was always a part of the story.

It was summer and my sister was sent to work on a farm. Her job was to harvest potatoes from the soil. This was an exhausting job because one had to be bent over for many hours digging at the potatoes. This farm belonged to the city and the Germans supplied the town with the slave workers to work it. There was a young boy who permanently worked there. He was blond; blue eyed and had regular features. My sister was sure that he was Polish. He took her

aside one day and told her a secret. He was Jewish. He looked like a Polish boy and this helped him pretend to be Christian. He was careful not to tell this fact to a stranger, even if the stranger was Jewish. Hiding as a Christian was very dangerous. One false step could put him in a disastrous situation. Being in a group, one had to be very cautious. You had to know how to behave, what to say and most important, to have good identification papers which stated that he was a Pole. No less important was having the knowledge of the Christian religion. If a male was accused of being Jewish, all those credentials would not help him too much once he was physically examined and found out to be circumcised. In Poland, only Jews were circumcised. The Germans could not distinguish a Jew from a Pole by looks. The trouble was that the Poles could easily recognize who was Jewish and denounce the hiding Jew to the German authorities.

The young boy, who pretended to be Christian, said to my sister that the only way to survive was to take a chance and to run away from the ghetto to hide or to go to a big city and pretend to be Polish. How smart and mature was this young teenager who took his fate in his own hands and understood more than these grown ups. The adults were educated but living in illusion that somehow they would survive. However, one has to be fair. It was not easy to escape and hide. Only a small percentage could actually try to do this and then success was not guaranteed. In the end, the majority of Jews hadn't the chance to escape. If the Polish population would be less hostile towards the Jews many more Jews could survive in forests and survive the War.

When my sister came home after work that day, she told my family about her conversation with this young Jewish boy whom she met on the farm. The words of this young boy, who was so brave, and so courageous that he took his own fate into his own hands stuck in our memory and urged us to do something. His advice was to escape, hide, and not to stay in ghetto waiting to be deported to an unknown place or killed.

CHAPTER 14

From this day on, the main subject of my family conversations was how to find a way to escape and where to hide. At this time, we had no parents, but my brothers and sisters were close and devoted to each other. My family did not trust the Germans and had the intuition that being transported meant death. We did not know that Jews were burnt in the crematoriums, but we knew for sure that once people were sent away no news arrived back here of what had happened to them. We were trying to figure out what we could do, where to escape and where to hide ourselves. Every member of my family had a different idea of how to carry this out. Some were not realistic, pure fantasies and impossible to work out. Others were very risky. One had suggested that we hide in the forest, but this was dangerous proposition. The Poles would uncover us sooner or later. We thought about also hiding in the cemetery. There was an abandoned mausoleum and we had the strange idea of hiding inside the empty vault. We even acquired false Polish identification cards and thought we could go to Warsaw, the capital of Poland and live there as Christians. This was also very risky. Poles would recognize us as being Jewish and denounce us to the Germans to get a reward. We were talking and planning, but the days were quickly passing and our time was running out. We did not agree on any concrete plan to solve our urgent problem. We just had to get out.

We knew that by all means we had to figure a way out. We had to avoid remaining in the ghetto any longer because there were rumors spreading that in the near future, the ghetto would be liquidated. It was only a matter of time. After all, this was the fate of all ghettos. Debica could not be an exception. One could say, that dead people were walking the streets of Debica though they were still alive.

As I wrote before, our apartment was in an attic and that stairs led up to it. The entrance was covered with a board, which had to be lifted in order to enter the attic. In one part of the attic, our apartment was built. The second part of the attic was empty and used as storage for unused things. Above the empty part of the attic was another attic. The entrance to this attic was well concealed. The whole ceiling of the first attic looked the same and no one could imagine that above it there was another attic. This was the perfect hiding place. When we moved to this apartment, we did not have the slightest idea about the other attic. For a long time our landlord did not tell us about the hidden attic. We were very surprised, when one day our landlord told us about this great secret. This was after the first "action" in the ghetto. This was good news, especially at a time when the possibility of a new "German action" started to look real and very certain.

We still were in the ghetto and still making great plans. The tension and anxiety in the ghetto was immense. There was a feeling in the air that disaster was coming soon.

It did not take long for these dire predictions to become a reality. One member from the Judenrat (Jewish committee) received terrible news from a German, with whom he was a friend, that the next day the Germans would surround the ghetto. Most likely, this German was paid for this information, but in either case he was not a Nazi and he saved human lives. Presumably, this information came from a very reliable source. As usual some people believed in this, others doubted it and lived in self-delusion.

We were in a good position in having a place where to hide and were fortunate that our landlord told us about this. Though my family took this warning very seriously, they thought that there would be enough time to go up to the attic and hide. It was late in the evening and my family was preparing to go to sleep after a long day of unnerving talking and planning about what would happen and our uncertain future. I was begging my family to sleep

overnight in the 'new' hiding place because it could happen that the ghetto could be under siege on the very next day. My family did not want to listen to my advice because it was very inconvenient and uncomfortable to sleep in the attic. The ceiling was very low and one could not stand straight. It was dark and there was not much space. I pleaded again and again to sleep this night in the attic, but they still were reluctant. Their answer was that they would manage to go into the hiding place when the time came. As it turned out this mistake could have had disastrous results. Only by a slight miracle we were spared from being transported. We remained in our apartment and fell asleep.

The next morning, we heard a loud knocking at our door, which awakened us from our sleep. We wondered who it might be. It was still dark outside and when we opened the door, it was my friend Zen who rushed in. Short of breath, he mumbled nervously that the Germans surrounded the ghetto. Zen's brother had a job at the railroad and he started work very early in the morning. With horror, he saw that the ghetto was totally surrounded by Germans. The whole town was asleep and this caught the people by surprise. Though the Jews knew that this would eventually happen, they did not know the exact time. If not for Zen's brother having to work so early in the morning and Zen's arrival with this bad news, we wouldn't have had enough time to go into the hiding place. I said to Zen's, do not go away, we have a hiding place and you could hide with us. Zen stayed.

In a hurry, we started to take things up to the attic that we needed the most and those indispensable things we needed for survival like water, matches, candles and some food in case we had to stay in the attic for a long period of time. We were in a panic and we almost started a fire. It was still dark outside, so we used candles to give light to the place. Accidentally, a rag caught on fire, but luckily it was put out immediately. Several strangers from the street ran up to hide in our hiding place. When

every one was inside, the opening was closed with a matching piece of the ceiling. It was so well concealed that it was very difficult to notice any difference in the appearance of that piece of ceiling compared with the rest of it. Inside of the hiding place was my family, my friend Zen, several strange people who came from the street, our landlord's daughter-in-law and her little baby daughter. The landlord along with two of his daughters and son went to another hiding place. They were afraid that the child might cry and endanger them. We were sitting on the floor, cramped in this small place and were almost motionless because we were afraid that the smallest noise might alert the Germans to our hiding place and we would be shot. There was the little baby and we were all concerned that the baby might cry out and we would be caught when they would go from one house to another to chase people out into the streets and to look for those Jews that were in hiding. After a short time of waiting, which seemed hours to us, the Germans entered our old apartment. We were frozen with fear, being afraid even to breathe. We heard loud voices coming from our apartment, along with heavy steps and all kinds of loud noises like knocking, pounding and thumping. Obviously, they were checking everything and looking for anything valuable.

Suddenly the baby started to cry. We were terrified and thought this was the end of our lives. The mother gave the baby a sleeping pill. She was sure that the baby would sleep, but obviously the pill did not work and now the baby was not sleeping. Her crying was not stopping. If her cries would not stop, our hiding place would be easy discovered.

We were fearfully waiting for the worst to come. There were no steps of Germans leading to our hiding place. We heard steps, but they were the steps of the Germans leaving our apartment. We breathed easier, but were still feeling tense and achy. We were sure that the Germans had heard the crying of the baby but evidently they did not figure out where the crying was coming from.

This was a miracle, that spending such a long time in our apartment they did not find our hiding place. One wonders what did they do for such a long time in our tiny apartment. Many hours later when we came downstairs, we finally got the explanation. Our room was in complete disarray. What furniture there was had been broken, everything was taken apart. Evidently they were looking for money, silver, gold, jewelry, and other valuable possessions. They must have been very mad by not finding anything and this was why they broke everything to pieces.

Hours passed by and we still were in the attic. We were completely exhausted and confused. We did not know what to do next. We did not know when to leave the hiding place. We did not know if the Germans left the ghetto, and what would happen to us when we left the hiding place. This thought troubled us the most.

We listened attentively to the noises coming from the outside. We strained our ears to hear but there was complete silence. We did not hear the slightest noise or hear a single voice. We could not stay in hiding forever so we decided to send one person outside to check the situation in the ghetto. It was like Noah who sent a dove from the ark to find out if the land was dry. We choose my older brother Sam to be the scout and obtain the information we needed. Since he was of slight build and a good acrobat, he had to go from the hiding place through a small opening on the roof of the attic and had to climb down the side of the building to the ground. It was still very dangerous to open our hiding place without knowing for sure what had happened in the ghetto. My brother managed safely, without any accident, to climb down. Impatiently everyone waited for his return. Amazingly, the baby stopped crying and was calm, but now the adults were nervous and likely to cry from frustration and fear.

Sam did not come and we were sick with worry. We waited and waited. Our concerns grew greater and greater with the passing of time. Our

imagination went wild. We thought the Germans were still in the ghetto and he was caught and killed. My younger brother , Leo, decided to go out and look for him. We did not want to let him go because we were afraid that whatever happened to Sam would happen to him too. In the end, he did not listen to us and left the same way Sam did. Now we were anxiously waiting for Leo to come back and worrying about both of them. We were so excited when they both came back. The news, which they brought back, was equally shocking. The Germans left, but they took the entire remaining Jewish population of the town along with them, except for a small number of young men and women. The men worked on the railroad and the women in the kitchen.

The town became "Juden Frei" (without Jews). The ghetto in Debica was finally liquidated and shared the fate of the other towns and cities. The ghetto was a ghost town. In the streets there were only the bodies of those Jews that were killed during the liquidation. There was no living soul around. The sounds of human voices were not heard. The houses were empty. It was the sad end of the Jewish community in Debica.

CHAPTER 15

We were illegal and had no place to go. All our plans turned out to be a fiasco. The people who hid with us left us. Only Zen, my friend, remained with us. Dismayed and helpless, we did not know where to go or what to do. One thing we realized is that we couldn't stay in the ghetto. In our distress, a strange idea came into someone's head; "why not try to hide for a while in the cellar in Soldatenheim?" This was where we had hidden ourselves during the first "action" in the ghetto. This time, my brother did not work there and it would be more complicated. We figured out that we could stay there for a short time until we could work out some other arrangement. My brother knew the place well and he could go to the kitchen during the night and bring us some food. We thought that this was a good idea. Besides, we

could not stay in the attic hiding without food or water any longer. Our plan was a risky undertaking, but we had no other choice if we were to carry out this plan. We decided to leave our hiding place during the night while the town was asleep and there would only be a few people on the streets and no workers in Soldatenheim. My friend Zen went with us. We removed the Star of David bands from our arms to get ready to leave the ghost ghetto. To leave the ghetto was extremely dangerous. Across from the ghetto was the Gestapo headquarters. The Germans used to observe the ghetto from there using binoculars. When they spotted an escaping Jew, they shot at him. We quietly slipped through the barbed wire fence that surrounded the ghetto. Luckily, the Gestapo did not notice us. The timing of our escape was right since it was in the middle of night and they probably were asleep. We started to walk through the streets separately. We were hoping to not draw attention to our traveling.

Our hearts were beating fast as we walked. We were very apprehensive about the people passing us on the streets. We met only a few people walking at that time of night. It was such a late hour. Some were drunkards who left the bars intoxicated and did not even pay any attention to us. There was no police on the streets. The town was in a deep sleep. All the people in the town were soundly asleep. It was like every night, but the Jews did not sleep anymore in the ghetto. They were gone. The gentile part of the town looked the same. There were not any dramatic changes happening to their lives. Who cared that the ghetto was liquidated and fellow citizen were transported. They were just Jews.

It was not a long way to the Soldatenheim. For us being nervous, it seemed to be miles away. We were fortunate not to encounter any problems while making our way to Soldatenheim and we arrived there in one piece. Leo led us one by one to the cellar, watching to see if anyone was around. We hurried, but it still it took some time until all of us were inside the

cellar. Exhausted from the tension and fear of the dramatic events, which occurred this day, we laid down in silence on the damp, cold and hard cellar floor. It was dark inside and the air was dusty. We were chilly, trembling from the cold or from anxiety and fear. Our emotions were a combination of relief and worry. Sure we were glad that the Germans did not catch us, but our future was murky and we did not know what the near future held for us. The prognoses were not the best. We were laying in complete silence for several hours. We were in a state of numbness, not having the strength to talk. Since we had not eaten for many hours, we started to get thirsty and hungry. The lack of water especially bothered me. My mouth was so dry and I had stomach cramps. My brother thought that this was the right time to go upstairs to the kitchen and steal some food and water for us.

He could not predict that while going to the kitchen he would meet a worker from Soldatenheim. At this time of night this was so unusual. This is what unexpectedly happened to him. A Pole who worked in Soldatenheim saw my brother. One could say that he was not playing with a full deck of cards. Of course he knew my brother, since he had previously worked there. Without any hesitation he went to the quarters of the German financial manager to denounce my brother. Walter, as I have previously mentioned, was my brother's former boss. He liked my brother. Walter got up to see what was going on. He assured the crazy Pole that he would take care of it. He thanked him for doing a good job and told him that he could leave.

The Polish worker left assuming that the German would reward him for catching a hiding Jew. When Walter confronted my brother he said to him, "Leo run away." Walter then left, not asking my brother any questions. My brother came to us, short of breath, mumbled these ominous words, "We have to leave this place." There was no use in asking any questions. Just looking at my brother's pale face and hearing his words, it was not hard to guess that something went very wrong. We left the cellar in a great hurry.

From afar we noticed that Walter watched us as we ran away. He stood by and did not try to stop us. Once again a miracle happened. It was one of the many miracles that happened to us during our struggles to stay alive. We had no choice but to return to the ghetto, which we left not too long ago. Again we walked the dangerous streets of Debica, even more scared than before. Our future was unknown as we entered the ghost ghetto. Once again we crawled through the barbed wire fence, but this time to return to the ghetto.

Once again, the Gestapo did not see us. This time, we saw sporadic Jews walking as the living dead. Possibly they came out as we did, from other hiding places. We were homeless. Our apartment was destroyed during the raid. The ghetto in Debica officially ceased to exist in the year 1942. Not one Jew, except for a small number of workers, was allowed to stay in the ghetto. To be caught here was punishable by death. Our situation was grave. We were bewildered and desperate, hungry and thirsty. We had no place to stay. We were still alive, but destined to die.

CHAPTER 16

By chance, my brother Leo met a friend in the street. He was a young man, who was one of the few left after the liquidation of the ghetto. He was working on the railroad. Almost all of the workers that were left were housed in the barracks, but he and his uncle stayed in their one room apartment. My brother told him about our critical situation and he took pity on us and let us stay with them in their apartment, although it was illegal. He was a good hearted and brave young man. His uncle also agreed with his decision. By doing this he endangered himself and his uncle in case the Gestapo found us.

Zen went to stay with his brother, who remained in the ghetto and also worked on the railroad. Zen, after staying several days with his brother, decided to go to Krakow where a ghetto still existed in Podgorze. Zen looked like a Pole, so his appearance helped him in his plans. He took off his Star

of David armband and crawled through the barbed wire fence and took the next train to Krakow. Evidently, the conductor of the train did not recognize him as being Jewish and he made it to Krakow. He also managed to get into the ghetto in Podgorze.

We stayed in my brother's friend apartment. We appreciated the goodness of his heart. My family took several trips to our old apartment and took out several suitcases with clothing and an album filled with pictures. We also took blankets and eiderdowns. Being in such an uncertain, bleak and hopeless situation, saving some belongings seemed completely foolish and irrational. As it turned out, this was practical and useful. It helped us to survive.

We three sisters slept in one bed. It was very uncomfortable, but we were glad to even have this little space to sleep. The worst thing was that I suffered from ulcers, which covered my legs. The puss from these ulcers was draining, and I covered them with some gauze and rags. I didn't have any ointment to apply to them and the gauze stuck tied to the surface of the ulcers. I couldn't do anything to ease my pain. I suffered quietly. Especially during the night, the pain was so excruciating and prevented me from getting any sleep.

We stayed all day in that room and were afraid to go out. There was nothing else to do than to sit or to sleep. But we were too stressed to be able to sleep. We brooded about what to do next. We were completely lost in our thoughts trying to find any reasonable, pragmatic solution to our situation. We were always hungry. There was not much to eat. My brother's friend and his uncle shared with us their meager portions of food that was rationed to them on the job. Sometimes they were lucky to get some bread from other sources. One good thing was that we had enough water to drink. We were fortunate to have a place to stay, but we knew that it was only temporary.

The Gestapo knew very well that some Jews were hidden during the "action" and their aim was to now make a raid to catch the last remnants of

Jews who managed to escape the fate of the other Jews. This time, they wouldn't bother to transport them. They would kill them where they stood. There were rumors that the Gestapo gave orders to dig graves to bury killed Jews. One could easily picture the prospect of our survival. We did not have any choices left. We were trapped like a fish in a net. We were trying to free ourselves, but the net got tighter and tighter with the passing of time.

There was no place to escape to. All our plans, which we made, were not realistic. In carrying them out, it became a fiasco. How many hours had we spent analyzing all the possibilities? We believed that Germany would be defeated at the end, though in this time it was still victorious. The big problem was how to survive during this time of war. Where could we run? This was an academic question for which one could not expect any answer to solve. Outside the ghetto, danger lurked in every corner. The German police and the Polish population were our enemies. Our fate was sealed. The Germans sentenced us to death. The Gestapo watched us from their headquarters. They searched out all movements in the ghetto.

Our depression grew and hopelessness overwhelmed us. One thing was left to pray to God for some miracle. And we prayed to the God of Israel. I was thinking about death and I was so scared. I was so young and did not want to die. I cried and cried until there were no more tears in my eyes. I remember when my brother Sam, who saw me despairing, said to me, "Don't cry. If I could give you my life to save you, I would give it to you without any hesitation." I prayed to God, "God, please send us a righteous Pole who could save us." Would my prayers be answered?

Someone was knocking at the door of the apartment late one evening. We were apprehensive, fearful about whom it could be. Nobody used to come to visit us. Was it the Gestapo? Who else? Whoever it was, we had to open the door? My sister Eda was the courageous one to open the door. There was no

German there, but a Polish countrywoman. Surprised, we looked at her. We saw a young smiling face, but it was wrinkled from working in the sun.

She entered the room. We wondered how she got through the barbed wire fence, which surrounded the ghetto. She was so naive. She didn't know that the Germans were watching the ghetto and that they shot trespassers. The Gestapo headquarters was located directly across from the ghetto. Why did she come? These were the questions, which came to our mind. In the next minute, we had our answer. She asked us if we had something to sell? Poles used to come to the ghetto before its liquidation to buy bargains from Jews in exchange for food. Even during that time, nobody would dare to come inside. The goods were exchanged through the openings in the fence. By coming into the ghetto, she risked her own life.

My brother's friend made a remark. She would do much better hiding Jews than to buy old clothes. This innocent remark, out of nowhere, decided about our future. The peasant woman did not say anything. The expression on her face showed that these words caught her by surprise and she was thinking about this remark. Finally, she said that she would talk this over with her husband and let us know the next day. Her answer was unexpected and unbelievable.

When she left the room, my sister Eda went after her. She kissed her and begged her to hide us and to save us from being killed. The peasant woman was visibly moved, seeing tears flowing from my sister's dark and beautiful eyes.

A little hope started to take root in our hearts. Maybe she was an angel sent to save us in our time of need. We were excited and could not sleep during the night. We kept thinking about if she would come and take us away. The next day we were anxiously waiting many hours for her to come. She kept her word and late in the evening she came back. We were elated when she said simply that she talked this over with her husband and that he agreed to hide you. After a moment of elation, my family became somber. How could

we go to complete strangers and put our lives in their hands. My family stood before a dilemma, to go and live or to not go and die. We did not know what kind of people they were. Could we trust them? We heard terrible stories about how Poles took Jews in to hide them and they robbed them, taking away all their valuables such as money, gold and all their belongings and afterwards they killed them or sometimes they called the Polish police because calling the German police might put them in danger. The Germans would brand them sympathizers and kill them and also either kill or transport the Jews.

On the other hand, how could we remain in the ghetto? We were illegal and would eventually be killed. Going to strangers was risky, but it was also a chance to stay alive. Later, after taking under consideration all arguments pro and con we made the decision to go. We had no choice but to escape from the ghetto.

We found an ingenious idea to test her intentions. We would give all our belongings to her today, but we would go with her the next day. If their intentions were bad and they did not want to hide us and only rob us, she would not come back to take us to their home. My family made her a proposition. Take all our belongings today and come for us the next day. She rejected the idea right away as a foolish one. There were rumors that the Gestapo would come to the ghetto soon to finish off the remaining Jews who had been in hiding during the last "action," which cleansed out the entire ghetto.

She assured us that everyone knows that graves were dug outside to bury the Jews in and she said that it made no sense for her to take our belonging without us, because when she would be able to come the next time, we would be dead. We heard her words and we liked what she said. Her words were music to our ears. Though our suspicion diminished, we were still not one hundred percent convinced that it was safe to go with her. We decided that all of us would not go that day. Only my sister Eda with all our belongings would go. She would check out the place and to see what kind of people the farmers were

and to talk with the farmer himself. So my sister left with Barbara, the peasant woman, taking with her all our meager possessions.

She arrived safely to their house. The farmer was very friendly and gave her something to eat. They had a very good conversation. My sister liked what she saw and the farmer made a very good impression on her. She wrote a letter to us giving us a short report about her findings. She gave the letter to the farmer's wife, which she delivered to us.

The next day Barbara came back. This time she brought a letter from my sister, Eda. The letter stated that the farmer was a deeply religious man and she could not imagine that this kind of person would be able to kill someone. His eyes had the look of an honest and decent man. Her letter was so assuring and completely eased our fears. We packed up our remaining personal belongings and left the ghetto. It was not such a simple and safe undertaking.

Even though the ghetto was empty, there was still a great danger involved in such an escapade. As I mentioned before, the ghetto was under Gestapo surveillance and being noticed by the Germans meant being killed on the spot. One by one, we slid through the space between the barbed wire fence and the outside. The fence surrounded the ghetto on all sides. We had done this several times before when we escaped to Soldatenheim, only to later return. We were experienced. When we were leaving, another unexpected complication arose. Some Poles were standing around watching us. Our hearts started to beat faster expecting the worse to come. They could easily catch us and deliver us to the Germans, which is what sometimes happened. This time fortune smiled on us, to meet good and honest people, who did not prevent us from escaping, but in the contrary encouraged us to escape. Seeing the sympathy of these strangers was heartwarming.

We took off the Star of David armbands we wore and walked separately to the river Wisloka where Tadek, the son of the farmer, waited with a horse

drawn wagon. The bridge over the river was demolished by allied bombing and was partially rebuilt to enable people to cross the river and reach the other side. To use this bridge, one had to pay a toll.

There were two toll men standing at one end that were collecting the money from people and allowing them to cross the bridge. You had to pay even more when you crossed with vehicles. We climbed into the wagon and sat down. We were bundled up in shawls and blankets. It was late fall and the evenings were cool and breezy. We closed our eyes to pretend we were asleep so as to not attract the attention of the toll men on the bridge. The men observed everyone closely who crossed to make sure that some Jews were not escaping. Possibly they did not do this on their own, but on orders from the Germans to keep watch for escaping Jews. When they recognized a Jew, they caught him and denounced him to the Gestapo. It was very dangerous to cross a bridge for escaping Jew even though we were disguised as peasants and one could not see too clearly our faces, which were wrapped with our shawls. We were a group of four people. Leo did not go with us because the farmer did not want take so many people in at one time. It would look suspicious. We were very nervous that we would be recognized as escaping Jews. It was a bright night because the moon was full. These unfavorable conditions added to make this a more serious situation. Barbara paid the toll and luckily the toll men did not pay any attention to us. All they saw was a peasant woman with her son driving a wagon.

Again, everything was going well and we crossed the bridge without any trouble. Now we could relax and open our eyes. We could breathe the fresh air and look around. It was so refreshing to see nature's beauty and to fill out our lungs with fresh air. For so many hours and days, we were cramped in scanty, smelly places. The horses galloped faster and faster, taking us to the unknown and unpredictable future. This was much better than the predicted future in the ghetto, death.

Our relaxation did not last for a long time. A peasant was walking on the road and made a sign to stop the wagon. When Tadek stopped the horses, the peasant asked for a favor to give him a ride. He did not even wait for permission, but jumped on the wagon and sat next to the driver. There was not too much space because Barbara was sitting in the front, but he did not care and squeezed himself between Tadek and Barbara. He was a talkative man and right away he started a conversation, mostly he talked about Jews.

Evidently, this was his favorite subject. He hated Jews and his hatred was expressed in his opinions about Jews. He was telling them how bad the Jews were and how the Germans should be thanked for ridding Poland of the Jews. One could easily imagine how we felt listening to him. Wrongly, we assumed that maybe he recognized us and this was why he was talking in such a way about Jews. One could also imagine how poor Barbara felt listening to his litany. She was a very smart woman and did not let him see that this conversation made her uncomfortable. On the contrary, she was self-controlled and played her role marvelously. She laughed and even made jokes about Jews, being completely in agreement with his views. One could only admire her behavior being so at ease. After driving with us for several miles, the peasant got down and left not suspecting that we were Jews.

Regrettably, this was not the last frightening event, which accosted us during our trip to the farmer's house. We noticed a young man running and when Barbara asked him what happened he said that the Germans together with Polish police are making a raid to catch Poles for work in Germany. This was the last straw of our tension and stressful journey. This could have had a tragic outcome if we were stopped for documents. Good fate did not leave us this time. The police were driving in a different direction than we were.

CHAPTER 17

Late in the night we arrived safely to the village Zassow, which was located not that far from Debica. This was fall 1942. A new card in our life began. Tired and completely exhausted from our tense and frightful journey, we climbed down from the wagon. Luckily none of the neighbors saw us because it was late and the village was fast asleep. There was a complete stillness only interrupted by the wind blowing and moving the branches of the trees.

Dragging our achy legs, we walked behind Barbara who took us to the barn where we sat down. Barbara left, but came back and brought us some bread to eat and coffee to drink. We were very hungry and this tasted like the best cake we had ever eaten. In the barn, hay was stored to feed the cattle in the wintertime. When we finished eating we laid down on the bales of hay. It was good that we were not allergic to the smell of hay. Sneezing could endanger our stay there. Someone passing by could hear our sneezing in the barn.

Even though we were tired from both our journey and from the previous nights when we couldn't get enough sleep, we could not fall asleep. We still were not sure about what would happen to us. We wondered if the farmers would keep us for a longer time if the war didn't end soon. Many questions and doubts of this kind filled our minds and wouldn't let us rest. The uncertainty of our future poisoned our minds. We escaped the imminent danger by leaving the ghetto but this was not a long-range solution. Even hiding here, far away from the ghetto, we could not remove, without any reservations, our fears and uncertainty. The future still looked unpredictable and cloudy.

Despite all these thoughts, flavored with pessimism and distrust, a small spark of hope began glowing and warmed our hearts. We finally fell asleep. Suddenly the silence of the night was disturbed by loud noises of knocking and banging. We woke up fearful and frightened. Our hearts beat with such speed that the fear became unbearable.

Our farmer, Kazimierz, and his son, Tadek, a teenager, did not go to sleep and did not rest. All night they worked hard to prepare the hiding place for us where we could live. We could not stay in the barn, someone could see us very easily.

These sounds that were fearful now became music to our ears. It was a good sign, because building a hiding place clearly meant that their intentions were to keep us and not kill us. We thought that this may be a dream, but this was not a dream. It was real. In the midst of all this noise, we fell asleep. This time we slept, but our farmer and his son did not sleep. They worked tirelessly to create our new home.

On the farm, there was a stable, which housed the horses and the cows. It was two separate compartments, divided by a wall. Kazimierz, the farmer, came up with the ingenious idea of where and how to build a hiding place for us. He removed the wall, which separated the horses from the cows and moved it close to one of the other walls leaving enough space between the walls where we could be placed. He cut out a square hole on the bottom of the wall that was big enough so that we could crawl through it to get into our hiding place. When we were inside, he inserted the piece back into the opening of the wall. The entrance was then concealed with a heap of manure. This was a good arrangement and a good precaution if a neighbor made an unexpected visit into the stable. Even the most concealed hiding place would not be safe in event the Gestapo came looking for hiding Jews. No place was safe from them.

In the morning, our hiding place was finished and we were ready to move in. We had to leave the barn where we spent the night and move into the stable. Again, this was not simple. We had to take under consideration that though it was early morning, someone could be around and see us. Peasants usually get up very early in the morning. Our farmer had to be very alert and watch if there were any neighbors or strangers outside while we walked from

the barn to the stable. If anyone saw us, it would put him or her and us in a very dangerous situation.

Our farmers, their son Tadeusz and daughter Irena were on guard. They stood at the four corners of the farm watching out if anyone was around or if someone on the road was approaching. Understandably, everyone was nervous and tense. We left the barn and in a great rush we ran to the stable.

Now, one by one, we crawled into our hiding place. Inside, it was dark. The plaster between the boards of the wall was removed to let the air to come through the openings. The space was small but there was enough space to lie down. The odor from the manure bothered us a lot. It was a stinky smell, which made us nauseous at the beginning, but later we got used to it. There were also little flies that fed on the manure. They flew in through the openings.

CHAPTER 18

In this place we started our vegetated life. We were happy to be there, separated from the hostile world that was out to get us. We were glad to be isolated from the world where hatred, bestiality and demonic power ruled. This dark compound and this smelly place was heaven to us. How lucky we were to successfully escape from the ominous world in which our fate of being killed was a grim reality.

Straw was spread on the bare ground and we sat or lied down. We had our basic necessities of living such as cups, plates, spoons and a knife. All these things we hung on the wall. We had a little mirror, comb, paper and a pencil. We had a thermometer, a prayer book, and eiderdowns. These were our treasures. We also had a little kerosene lamp, which we could only light during the day and only when we were eating. When it was dusk, the kerosene lamp had to be turned off because then light would be visible through the cracks in the wall and the neighbors would wonder what or who was inside the

stable when all the members of the farmer's family were inside their house. This would be suspicious and right away rumors would be spread that something unusual was going on in our farmers stable. We could not talk loudly because people passing by the stable might hear our voices and wonder who is talking inside the stable when our farmers and their children were at home. We had to be very careful not to light the kerosene lamp during the night and not to talk too loudly. We had to avoid attracting the attention of any passersby or neighbor. We whispered so softly that it was barely audible.

There was nothing to do. Almost all day, it was dark inside. We did not have any books or newspapers to read. It was too dark to even be able to read. One thing was left for us to do to sleep. We slept almost all day and night with the exception of the time we ate, peeled potatoes or washed our face and hands. These were the only breaks during the day when we did not sleep. Looking back now, I cannot understand how we could sleep for so many hours.

My sisters were glad to have the job of peeling potatoes, which Barbara used for our meals. This task had two advantages. First it gave them some work to do and was a break in their inactivity all day along. I too enjoyed this precious short time. My hobby was drawing and there was enough dim light for this purpose as well. More importantly, it gave us a chance to save some water, which we used for washing our faces and hands. We were looking forward for the time when Kazimierz used to bring us a big pail filled with water and a bag with potatoes to be peeled. Kazimierz had several jobs. Every day he used to take out a bucket and empty it. He would also bring us the potatoes to peel and everyday he brought us our meals three times a day. Barbara was preparing our meals and baking the bread.

We only ate during the day because the light from the little kerosene lamp, which we lit, was not visible. Our food was always the same and in small portions. Exceptions were when there was some hope that the war would

end soon. If the Germans were losing, our food got better. This we used as some kind of a barometer on how the war was proceeding. When Kazimierz brought us a portion of pork and an additional meal, we knew that the news was good. The piece of meat was too small to divide between all of us so my family decided to give the whole portion to me.

Usually, Kazimierz brought us our meals. Sometimes, Barbara brought us the food instead of her husband. For breakfast, we usually received potatoes with pieces of lard and black coffee sweetened with saccharin. For lunch, we had beans or cabbage and potatoes. For supper, we had bread and black coffee. Every week we got a loaf of bread. We tried to ration it in such a way that it would last for the whole week. We did not eat much, but then we were not too hungry or thirsty. All we did was sit motionless and sleep a lot. Our body did not need too much energy to function. Sleeping was a blessing for us because it gave us a rest from worrying.

After a short time of blissful excitement of avoiding imminent danger some symptoms of depression showed up. The minutes, hours, and days dragged on. For me, the adjustment to these conditions of living was really very hard. The rest of my family took this much better than I did. I was used to always being outside. I used to walk for many hours with my friends. Now being confined in this small, murky and stuffy enclosure affected me greatly. At times, I could hardly endure it. In addition, I was not allowed to talk above a whisper. In the beginning, I was able to sleep for many hours, but that changed now. I was laying with my eyes closed and sleep did not come. I felt so bad that my family started to worry about me. My sister Ann, to make me feel better, thought that it would be beneficial to take me out from the hiding place for a walk. This was a very risky decision because someone could see us. It was in the middle of the night when we went out from the hiding place and of course, without the knowledge of our farmers. If they knew about it, they would be rightfully mad with us.

How beautiful it was to walk outside and to breathe the fresh air. The sky was cloudless and the moon and stars were shining brightly. I thought about how divine it would be to stay outside forever and not return to the hiding place. My pleasure at being outside was lessened by the fear that someone could see us. We were not outside too long so as not to prolong our hazardous escapade. We went back to our hiding place. This was the only time that we ventured outside. The risk was too high.

Being exposed to the outside did not improve my condition, but intensified my yearning for freedom. I could not sleep at all during the day while my family slept. I looked through the openings of the wall, straining my eyes to see the trees growing inside the garden and listening to chirping of the birds. I envied the birds, which were free and could fly anywhere they wanted. I heard children playing and making noise. I asked myself a question, what did I do wrong? For what sins am I being punished? Why could I not be outside and enjoy myself like the free people and not be cramped into this hiding place? There were many more unanswered questions.

These feelings of self-pity overwhelmed me, but my reason started to persuade me to stop complaining and to come to my senses. What right had I to be discontented when I should be thankful that we were able to escape from the ghetto and be rescued in the last minute? Death was imminent. It was hanging over our heads and to find shelter in the house of righteous Poles was a miracle. Slowly, my reasoning prevailed and slowly I accepted these conditions of life. It wouldn't last forever. Did I have any other choice? I just had to adjust to this new reality. I tried hard to cope with my life in the hiding place.

My family adjusted well to life in hiding, but it was not always so easy for them. It took them a long while to get rid of the poisonous thoughts that tormented them: What would happen if Germany won the War? What could happen if the War lasted for a long time and our saviors would get tired of us and

threw us out or maybe kill us. The uncertainty of the future was disturbing. Nobody could predict what kind of complications might arise or what the future would bring.

There existed in our mind, contradictory feelings such as faith and disbelief along with hope and despair. There was a constant conflict of opposite views. We had to be thankful to God for answering our prayers and for sending us good and honest people who kept us in hiding and fed us. They endangered their own lives and the life of their children. It was not easy for our farmers. Every time some new rumor of catching Jews in hiding places were heard, they had sleepless nights in worrying that the Germans would find us.

Our farmer Kazimierz was thinking of how to make the hiding place more secure in case someone came. He dug a tunnel which lead from our hiding place to outside, which would enable us to escape in case someone came looking for Jews in the stable. There were troubling rumors spreading that the Germans used dogs in searching for Jews.

These were only false rumors, which never took place. The Germans used to search for Jews only when there was a denunciation. They needed some proof or accusation before they would come and search.

When we left the ghetto to hide ourselves in the farmer's house in the village Zassow, my brother Leo remained in the ghetto to join us later. There were too many of us to take at the same time.

Barbara and Tadeusz drove again to the ghetto to pickup my brother and take him out of the ghetto. Tadeusz waited close to river Wisloka while Barbara walked to the ghetto. This time she did not dare go inside but was standing outside and looking into the ghetto.

There was no one to be seen. The ghetto was completely deserted. She did not know what to think about this. A man passed by and seeing her standing there, informed her that the ghetto was totally liquidated. There were no more Jews. Officially, the vibrant Jewish community in Debica did not exist anymore.

Barbara and Tadeusz came back empty handed with very bad news for us. Hearing the sad news, we were heartbroken and cried. We were out of our mind with worry not knowing what had happened to him. The only thing left for us to do was to pray to God to bring him safely back to us. With each passing day of hearing no news from him, our hopes of seeing him again started to fade. Now all our thoughts were concentrated on him and we could not do a thing about it. Again and again we blamed ourselves. Why did we not all leave the ghetto together? Our despair and crying would not change what had happened to him.

One day when our hopes at ever seeing Leo again were almost completely vanished, something unexpected and incredible happened. It was a day as usual. Inside our hiding place, it was dark and there was nothing to do so we were dozing. All of a sudden, we heard the steps of someone approaching our hiding place. Because this was not a regular time when food was brought to us we got apprehensive and scared. We waited anxiously to see who was coming and why. It was Barbara coming. The expression on her face indicated that she brought us some news. Our hearts jumped in anticipation to hear what she had

to tell us. Barbara brought us the best news. She was so excited and she that Leo was in her house. When she regained her composure she told us the whole story.

When Leo came into their house there was a neighbor inside. This was why they could not talk to him. Kazimierz stepped on his foot and he understood the message. When he left the room, Kazimierz went after him and told him to go outside to the forest, which was located not too far away and wait there until night. When it was dark, Tadeusz would go there and pick him up and take him to our hiding place. My brother did as he was told.

One could only imagine our joy at seeing our brother alive. The news was so good that it seemed to us that we were dreaming. I even pinched myself to find out if I was dreaming. This was not a dream, but a true fact. Still it was like a fairy tale where unbelievable and fantastic events take place and there is always a happy ending. Barbara left and we remained as happy as one could be.

It was still light outside, but not in our hiding place. We still had to wait several hours until Tadeusz would be able to go to the forest to pickup Leo. We impatiently waited for the darkness of night, but time was passing slowly for us. It seemed that the light did not want to be replaced by the darkness. It lingered. Leo was not sheltered in safety yet. We were uneasy that someone could notice him in the forest and recognize that he was Jewish and denounce him to the Germans or the Polish police.

Finally, darkness set over the village and now was the right time for Tadeusz to go to the forest. It was rather close a short distance from our farmer's house. Tadeusz had no difficulty in spotting my brother. He was sitting on the ground between two trees. When they walked back to the house they looked around to see if there was anyone walking on the road or if anyone was standing in front of the house. Luckily, nobody saw them and they safely came. Immediately, Barbara took him to our hiding place. It was an

overwhelming feeling of joy in seeing him alive and together again with us. Our gratitude went to G-d who answered our prayers. It was immeasurable. We smiled and cried but they were tears of happiness. After our excitement cooled off and we got used to the fact that he was with us, we could concentrate on his story involving his experiences from time we left and what a story he had to tell.

Shortly after we left the ghetto, the Germans made a raid to catch those Jews who managed to stay alive by hiding themselves while the liquidation of the ghetto was taking place. The Jews, which they caught at this time, were killed on spot and buried by Poles in graves specially prepared for this purpose.

All the 'legal' workers who were left after the liquidation were deported to an unknown place. This was the final end of all the Jews in Debica. The Jewish population had been totally rooted out. The German henchmen perfectly carried out their orders and their goal was accomplished.

Just in the nick of time, my brother with the company of two friends who were brothers, succeeded in escaping. These friends lived in the village before the war, and their parents had a neighbor, a Polish peasant, who had befriended them. This peasant took the friends and also took my brother. He gave them shelter and hid them in a barn. From the first moment, my brother was thinking of leaving them and joining us. He had to keep his plans to himself because they would never allow him to leave them. They were afraid that if he was caught and tortured, he would be forced to reveal their hiding place.

My brother wanted to be together with us and share his fate with us. Once he decided to leave them, nothing could change his mind. He started to make plans about how to carry this out. First, he had to be very careful and not to make the smallest remark, which could reveal his thoughts. Secondly, he had to choose the right time and figure out how to do it and when. He

saved a part of a loaf of bread, which he would take with him. One night, he was tossing and turning and could not sleep. He kept thinking of leaving and then decided that that night was the right time to leave. He knew that the longer he waited he would lose his courage to leave his friends. Some inner impulse urged him to go. Go! Go now! Don't delay any longer! His friends were sound asleep. He dressed quietly, avoiding making the smallest noise. He slowly opened the door without making a single sound. One of his friends moved in his sleep. My brother stiffened, afraid even to breathe, fearing that he might awaken and all his plans would be ruined. This did not occur. His friend continued to sleep. He left and started to walk very fast, nearly running away. It seemed to him that he heard his friend screaming that he should not go away, but that he should come back. In reality, it was his imagination and not his friend speaking. It was true that leaving his friends was not an easy undertaking, but it was much harder to find the village of Zassow and the house of our farmers.

My brother must be very bright and he evidently possessed exceptional skills of orientation because he was able to accomplish both tasks. He did not have any maps and the road signs were hard to follow. He was familiar with the terrain and he knew the name of the village and also the name of the peasants who hid us. He did not know the roads nor did he have any road maps to show him the direction to the village. Our village was far away from the village where he stayed with his friends.

He also had another problem. He had to avoid meeting any peasants walking on the roads or driving by who might easily recognize him as being Jewish. He looked a little strange because he was unshaven and unkempt from being in hiding. He walked on the side roads, being very careful not to meet anybody. When he saw someone walking from afar, he hid himself except when he saw a child. To ask children for information was much more secure than asking adults. Some older children could provide him with valuable information, but

most of the time they did not know anything. He knew that children would not recognize him as being a Jew and would not turn him in. This would not be the case with adults. If he were recognized, it would result in death. He walked many hours and was tired and hungry. The small portion of bread he had did not satisfy his hunger. He was also very thirsty. Not too far away there was a stream flowing. He went to the stream and washed his face to freshen himself and he drank the water from stream. He rested for a while, but he could not waste too much time because he had to reach the village before nightfall.

Until now, everything was going well. He walked many, many miles without any unpleasant encounters. But his luck took a different turn. He unexpectedly came face to face with two young Poles. They appeared suddenly. He did not understand how it happened and how he did not notice them in being so watchful and careful. When they saw him, they called him a dirty Jew and asked him where was he going. My brother was a strong and athletic young boy, and he was used to defending himself. Being one of the few Jewish boys attending a public high school, he often was attacked by Polish students. He had some practice in fighting. Now being confronted with two hooligans, he applied his skills. Besides, the instinct of survival prompted his action and gave him extraordinary strength. Quick, without any hesitation, he kicked one in a very sensitive place. At the same time, he hit the other as hard as he could, knocking him down. Not looking behind him, he ran as fast as he could. He ran for a while and when he noticed a forest, he hid himself inside. He was wet from perspiration and his heart was beating fast from running. He was lying on the moss of the forest entirely exhausted and catching his breath. He strained his ears to hear if someone was running on the road, but there was complete silence. He only heard the wind rustling the branches and the chirping of the birds.

He thought that he could reach the village Zassow before dark, but it was impossible. He was still too far way. Now he changed his plans. He stayed in the forest until it was dark and walked all night. It was harder to find the roads but it was safer. After the dangerous encounter with the young men, he had to take greater measures of precaution. The next day he arrived in a village. He was reading the name of the village and he could not believe his eyes. The name of the village was Zassow. He read the name several times to make sure that he did not make a mistake. His eyes did not fool him. He could not comprehend fully how he managed to find the village where we stayed. One had to believe that an angel had led him all the way to us. This was not the end of his unbelievable story. The first house he went to was the house of our farmers. How could someone explain that he went up to this house without being afraid that the peasants inside would denounce him? He, who was so careful, took a chance to go up to this strange house. Sometimes, there were things, which one could not grasp and explain only by pure reason. Was not this episode one link in a chain of many events, which miraculously had a happy ending? How good it was to have Leo with us and not have to worry about him. He was safe with us in our hiding place and his fate would be connected with ours. One could learn an important lesson: never lose hope.

CHAPTER 19

Everything went back to normal. We had plenty of time to think now, not only about ourselves, but also about our relatives and friends from Debica who were deported. We wondered what had happened to them and if they were still somehow alive. If they were alive, we wondered, what kind of abuse and torture were they being exposed to? All of these unanswered questions made us sad. How painful it was for my sisters to witness the "action" in the ghetto. Their visual memory of the horrible scenes of the young and old along with the

children mercilessly killed and the arrogance of those individuals, who played God, deciding who was to live and who was to die would endure.

I was thinking about my friends from Krakow whom I left behind. I remember my best friends, Sydia and Franka, who went to stay with her sister in Kielce and many other friends. I understood clearly how fortunate I was to be together with my family in the hiding place. Though we experienced hardship and fear, we also had a chance to survive.

Time was passing day after day. Nothing special happened. Our farmers kept us and did not come to us with bad news. I got used to living in these harsh conditions and accepted the fact that I was in some kind of prison from which I could not move out. Everyday, I looked forward for the time when we could light the kerosene lamp. I took advantage of this time with drawing. This gave me some pleasure and relaxation. I was listening to the sounds from the outside world. I was looking through the cracks, but couldn't see too much.

The fall went by and then winter came. We were prudent to take warm clothes with us along with several eiderdowns because in Poland, the winters were very cold and people covered themselves with eiderdowns. When the winter came, we were prepared for the cold weather. We had a lot of warm clothing to protect us from the cold and keep us warm. We slept on many layers of straw. We were dressed in layers of winter clothes and were covered with the eiderdowns. I was drawing with gloves on. This was hard to do, but I did not want to deny myself this little pleasure. Picture us all bundled up and sitting or lying in one place all day and night in complete darkness. There was no space to walk. There was only enough space to fit us. We could only whisper. Outside, the wind was blowing and the snow was falling. This little space for was not so bad and considering our options, it was a blessing. We were neither hungry nor cold.

We survived the winter and our hopes for surviving increased. This hope gave us the strength to endure all inconveniences. I understood that the only reason we were being persecuted was not because we were bad but because we were Jews. I pledged to myself that if I survived, I would never abandon my Jewish heritage, in spite of our enemies, who wanted to erase my nation from the surface of the world.

Spring arrived. The seasons changed, but not our lifestyle. On one side, this was good because we were alive, but on the other hand, our situation had not improved. The days were longer, but for us this did not have any meaning. In our hiding place, it was always night. We heard the birds singing outside, but we could not see them. The air was fresh outside, the flowers blossomed and the sun shined brightly. We did not breathe the fresh air. We could only breathe the smelly air, which was inside. We did not see the shining sun, but only the dim light from the kerosene lamp during the short period of time during the day when we could have light. We could not smell the flowers. The only difference was that we didn't have to wear warm clothes and cover-up with the eiderdowns. We could move our bodies freely, and this felt good.

We saw our farmer Kazimierz three times a day. During the winter, Barbara did not pay us any visits. However, with the beginning of spring, her visits were sporadic. We did not miss her when she did not come, but were rather glad because any time she came to visit us she used to bring depressing news. As they say, "No news is good news." We were left with ourselves and with our thoughts.

CHAPTER 20

The weather started to get warmer and the small flies began breeding on the manure. They multiplied into a very large number and penetrated through the openings in the wall. The little flies bothered us immensely while we ate

our meager meals and when we had light from the kerosene lamp. They were falling into our food and they were all over us. There was another problem, which was more serious and urgent. The smell of the decomposing manure and the increased heat was so intense that it made all of us nauseous. Our saviors discussed this problem to find some solution. They understood that we couldn't stay any longer in this hiding place because we could get sick. Becoming sick would create a very dangerous situation. What could they do with sick Jews? They could not call a doctor because they would then be in trouble.

It was obvious to them that we had to be moved to another location. The question was where? After hours of considering the alternatives, Kazimierz chose the best one, to build a new hiding place in the attic of his house.

Once his wife approved this idea, he began right away to do the job. His son, Tadeusz, helped him on this job. Again, we heard the banging of the hammers along with all OF the other sounds connected with building. These sounds made us feel good for two reasons. First, we knew that they were keeping us and this eased our fears of being thrown out and secondly, we were looking forward to a new place. We hoped that the new place would be more suitable for living. We waited impatiently and looked forward TO the time when we could move in. Finally, the day came when our new hiding place was finished and we were being moved to the new location. We were very excited. Again, the whole family, but the youngest son Mietek, participated in the moving from the stable to the attic.

This was not an easy or safe undertaking. They were watching to see if it was safe to leave the stable and whether the neighbors were outside, or if anyone was walking along the road and could see us. They also had to choose a time when their youngest son was not home. This was not as simple as it seems even though the distance between the stable and house was very small. Everyone was very tense and attentive.

We ran fast, one after another, until we were safely inside the house. The door was then locked and inside we could all rest a little. The next step was much easier. We climbed the ladder and went into the attic. Our first impression was great and we were very pleased. We did not expect it to be so bright. One had to remember that we stayed for a long time in complete darkness, so even a little light was very bright for us. It did not matter to us.

We started a new chapter in our life in the attic.

CHAPTER 21

This was the summer of 1943. This new hiding place, compared to the old one, was paradise. There was light and no need for a kerosene lamp. More importantly, we didn't have to deal with two major nuisances such as: the vile smell of the manure and those annoying little flies. We were really very happy with this new place, which was a great improvement from our previous living conditions.

Our farmers' idea was ingenious and he and his son Tadek worked very hard to build this new hiding place. They did an excellent job. The floor of the attic was not straight, but on one side higher. It slanted down. Kazimierz put a second floor above the first floor, but this floor was straight. In doing this, he created an empty space between the two floors in the place where the lower floor was slanted. It was enough space to lie down and hide between the two floors in case of an emergency. The entrance was from the side of the floor bordering with the roof. The floor was covered with heaps of hay, which the farmer fed to the cattle during winter.

We were sitting or lying on the pile of hay the whole time. The smell of hay was aromatic and soothed our frayed nerves. We were lucky that no one was allergic to the hay. Otherwise, sneezing would endanger us all. The air was fresh and we were delighted to breathe the fresh air that cleaned out our

lungs from the smelly air that was in the stable. We had light as well. Even though the light inside was not as bright as on the outside, this luxury meant so much to us. How divine it was not to be in darkness for the whole day. The only problem was that the ceiling was very low and one had to be very careful when moving from one place to another so as not to hit the head. There was more space but we could not walk because we were on the top of an apartment and our steps would betray us by indicating that someone was upstairs. We walked only when there was no neighbor or the farmers' little son downstairs. We couldn't walk straight, but had to bend our heads down. From time to time, we accidentally hit our heads on the pillars, which were between the roof and the floor.

CHAPTER 22

In the middle of our monotonous existence, we got horrible news. It was April 1943 and Barbara came upstairs. As usual, we did not like her visits because we knew something happened, but we did not expect to hear about such a tragedy, which befell the Jews in Warsaw ghetto. Barbara said that the ghetto in Warsaw was burning and that the Jews were burning inside of it. This was a sad day for us. The pain was overwhelming and we cried for our brothers and sisters who suffered so much.

It was a beautiful spring season. It was the nicest time of the whole year, but not for these poor people in the Warsaw ghetto. The sky in ghetto was not blue, but was darkened by the suffocating smoke of the burning houses. Jews in the ghetto will never see the sun shining or smell the scent of the blooming flowers. The beautiful children will never laugh, play or become adults.

What we did not know were the events of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. After the war, we were told about the heroism of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. The courageous fighters who heroically fought back and did not want

to be led to the slaughter house as animals. The bravery of the young and old, including men, women and children, who showed the world that they, like the defenders of Masada against the Romans, chose to die rather than to surrender. Before they died, they killed many Germans and held on for much longer than countries did with their military forces. Their heroism will be engraved forever in the memory of Jews from all over the world. The history books will tell the future generations to come about those proud and heroic Jews in the Warsaw ghetto who were not afraid to stand up to the mighty Germans. It would be a reminder to the whole world, that seemed oblivious to the Jewish sufferings and did not even lift a finger to help the embattled Jewish people, that the Jews are an ancient nation that is stubborn and has an inner strength, which no force can break. Some in the world were even glad that the Germans did the dirty work for them.

After a time of living in this more convenient place, we started to take it for granted. The days were longer and we did not sleep as much as we did in the stable. In the stable, we were like bears hibernating during the wintertime. Being awake for so many hours without having anything to do was not easy for me to endure. I was looking for something to occupy myself and I worked out some kind of a daily routine. In the morning I washed my face and hands with a little water, which we had left from the water, which our farmer Kazimierz brought to us to use when we peeled the potatoes. Later, I combed my hair for a long period of time, with hundreds of strokes, glad to be active. I had long hair and we did not have scissors to cut my hair. We avoided asking our farmer for anything so as not to annoy him. During the many months that we were in the stable through out the fall, winter and also during the first days of spring in the attic, we could not wash our bodies or our hair or brush our teeth. We didn't even have a change of underwear. How could one explain that the ulcers on my legs, which were so painful without

any medication, or sterilized gauze, cleared up by themselves? Luckily, we did not get sick while living with our non-hygienic practices.

Breakfast consisted of only potatoes and black coffee. It was good to eat, but the same thing over and over again was a torture. Potatoes were our main nourishment. I had no books to read. As I have mentioned before, we never asked our saviors for anything special. We were satisfied that they kept us safe and hidden. We never complained, but were quietly sitting in one place so as not to put any burden on them and nor to annoy them.

What I did have was a pencil and a small copybook. I could write and draw. I was limited on how much I could write so I did not fill in the whole copybook because that was the only one that I could have. We also had a chess set, which we took with us from our long abandoned apartment. My brother taught me how to play chess. Every day, I played one game. It was mentally tiring for me to play more than that a day. Playing chess had a therapeutic effect on me. It helped me escape from the reality of our situation and I relaxed being engaged in the activity of the game.

In the attic, like the stable, we had to talk in subdued voices. If someone passing the house heard voices coming from the upstairs, they would wonder who might be upstairs in the "empty" house. When someone came to the house, a neighbor or someone to buy something in their little grocery store, we could not talk at all. If a relative or neighbor visited them or even if their little son was home, we had to be silent. During such times we were even afraid even to whisper. It would be suspicious hearing voices from upstairs while all members of the family were inside the house. Many strangers used to come to shop. They bought oil, flour, matches, salt and sugar for example. Our main goal was to not attract any attention. We tried not to make any noise or drop anything. Their little boy, Mietek was not told that we were upstairs because he was too young to be trusted with this kind of

secret. Our farmers had to watch out to make sure that he was not around when they brought food upstairs to us.

Mietek was crazy about pigeons and had a couple of pigeons. One time, a pigeon flew into the attic through a very tiny window. It was rather a square opening in the attic. He wanted to go upstairs to look for the pigeon. His father did not let him go and found some excuse. We managed to catch the pigeon and threw him out through the opening. Mietek thought that the pigeon flew out by himself and this was the end of the story. He was too young to suspect anything.

The comings and goings of so many strangers in the house had its good and bad sides. The bad side was that we had to restrain from making any movements or even whispering. The good side was that we got to hear human voices and listen to their conversations. To merely see a human face provided some kind of entertainment for us. It was like going to a movie or the theater. I could listen to them for hours with my face glued to the surface of the board, which covered the entrance to the attic. I was looking down through the cracks and saw the faces of the young and the old peasants. I heard them laughing and joking. The most banal conversations were amusing and interesting. I envied that they could talk loudly, could walk, and could perform all the essential activities of normal life. I'm certain that they had all types of problems to deal with. They had to work hard and this showed on their faces, but they did not have to hide, living in constant fear of discovery and then death. I was also listening to the sounds coming in from the outside. I could see the peasants walking by our house. I heard their voices and the laughter of the children playing outside.

CHAPTER 23

A new season started. It was summer. The days were longer and the sun was shining outside. The birds were singing. The aroma of fresh air and the

scent of flowers growing in the garden came through the openings around the roof of the house. I yearned to go out and see the blue sky and the flowers. It was such an immense need that I could not control my feelings. I cried softly at my despair. The tears that flowed down my face and reached my lips had a salty taste. This was a weak moment for me and after awhile I came to my senses. I reminded myself that I shouldn't complain, I should be thankful to have a hiding place and to be still alive. This place was much better than the smelly and dark stable. In the attic, we were so close to enjoying all of the luxuries of light, fresh air and more space while, at the same time, being trapped in another gilded cage. Would our suffering ever end? How would it end with us alive or dead? We were extremely lucky that we were away from all the hostilities of the outside world.

We slept fewer hours. The singing of the birds awakened me in the morning. Their chirping was so melodic and pleasant to hear. They were free to fly where they wanted. We were trapped. In the evenings, lying down and being awake, I liked to listen to the croaking of the frogs. Even the rain and the storms had their own fascination for me. I was listening to the pouring rain rushing down and pounding on the roof. The thunder and lightning did not frighten me. It made me feel alive. I tried to find some pleasure in the things with which people, in a normal life, would not bother with or even notice.

Peasants in the village were engaged in their daily routines like working in the fields, milking cows and feeding the chickens and geese, which freely ran around. The dogs were barking when seeing strangers. A normal life existed outside where people loved and hated, were happy and sad, laughed and cried and experienced all human feeling in general. People had dreams, they lived and died, but from natural causes.

We lived, but we were confined to an existence of stagnation and uncertainty. The fear of being found out or being denounced by some neighbor

or the fears that our saviors might get tired with us and try to get rid of us never left us completely. This uncertainty was killing us slowly. The War was going on and on and we did not see an end to it.

Our farmers were also getting depressed that the war was not ending. Rumors were spreading that the Germans would go from house to house with trained dogs to look for Jews. These were false rumors to discourage people to protect Jews. One thing was true, that in case someone denounced a Jew, the Germans would come and kill not only the Jew, but also the Poles who hid the Jews. They would kill all the children and burn down the house. Our farmers were frightened and anxiously looking for the end of the war. My sister Anna had to be a psychologist and a politician to try to expel these fears from our saviors and to give them hope that the War would soon end and that the Germans would be defeated. Barbara started to buy a German newspaper and Anna read the newspaper to them. She knew German well. This was the first time that we could have some news about the outside world and about the War. The newspaper was a good source of information about the events that occurred in the world and about the fighting of the Allied forces with the Germans. Many times the newspaper was not telling the whole truth about their losses, but they had to admit to some. When Barbara paid us a visit, we knew what bothered her and my sister, referring to the news from the newspaper, tried to convince Barbara that the War is approaching an end. She read parts and translated it into Polish. When Barbara left the attic, she was in a better mood believing that War would not last long. When days, weeks and months passed and there were no signs of an end to the War, it became more difficult to convince Barbara and dispel her fears.

Did my family believe that Germany would be defeated at the end? Yes, we believed but the question was when and how we would survive until that moment. We could not predict what would happen. We did not know what the near future held for us. One had only to have patience, not to loose hope

and to pray to G-d. We really never were hungry. We ate very little, but our bodies did not burn up too much energy by being inactive. Our food lacked the basic ingredients of a balanced diet: no vitamins, no fruits, no vegetable, no dairy products and not too many proteins. The only proteins we received were from beans. Eating such a high starch diet could have caused some health problems. We were very young and healthy and this played a great role in our staying healthy. We only had some minor problems. My brother Sam started to lose his facial hair, probably a result of the lack of vitamins in our diet.

During the hot summer, the only one time we washed our bodies was when the farmer brought us a pail filled with warm water. We also got to wash our hair. We found washing powder in the attic and my sister washed our underwear and all our clothes in the cold water left from peeling the potatoes. The washed clothes dried out very fast because it was hot inside the attic. We were fortunate to find this washing powder and be able to do some washing. This powder lasted until the end of our staying there. Of course the farmers did not know about this.

It was the end of summer. The time was flying, very slowly for us. It was the same routine, monotony, boredom and the same fears and doubts.

CHAPTERhhhh 24

One day, our monotonous life was interrupted by an unusual occurrence. It was early morning and we were still asleep when a tremendous noise awakened us. It was shooting that seemed to be near our house. We became terrified and imagined that the Germans came and were shooting everyone in the village. We were tense expecting the worse to come, but nothing happened. The shooting of the machine guns was silenced and all was quiet again. We were wondering what could it be. When Kazimierz came and brought us breakfast, we were told what happened. Gypsies were staying in a camp in the forest not far from our house. Unexpectedly, the Germans came in the early morning when the gypsies

were asleep and surrounded the camp. They killed everyone in the camp including the women and men and young and old alike. The barbaric Nazis added a link to the chain of their inhuman acts of crime, death and bestiality.

After summer, fall came. The days started to get shorter. The leaves started to fall. During the night we heard strong winds blowing, pounding and shaking the branches of the trees. The farmer continued to bring food to us three times daily. Sometimes their daughter, Irenka, came to us. At times, their son Tadeusz came for a while. I still was looking down through the cracks and listening to every thing what was going on downstairs. I got more and more accustomed to my life here. Sometimes, it seemed to me that I was living in this place all my life.

The news from the front was still not encouraging. Our farmers started to be depressed again and had sleepless nights. They worried about the War not coming to an end and about the dangers of keeping Jews. Their bad mood increased and we were troubled with uncertainty as to what they had planned to do with us in case the War kept on going.

Danger was lurking from every corner. Everyone was our enemy: the Germans, the Poles and even the neighbors. One could not even trust our saviors one hundred percent. It appeared to us many times that someone was standing too close to our attic and eavesdropping or that people coming to our farmers' store heard a noise coming from upstairs. Of course, this was only a delusion caused by our over-sensitivity.

One day, the bailiff of the village made an assembly of all the villagers. During this meeting he warned them about Jews who might be hidden by some of them. He tried to scare them by saying that the Germans had specially trained dogs who sniffed out these hiding Jews. He continued on that if someone knew about a hiding Jew or if someone was hiding a Jew, he had to come to him to inform him about this. This would be confidential. He would call the Polish police who secretly would get rid of the hiding person.

In other words, the one in hiding would be killed, without anything happening to the peasant who hid the Jew. This information would also be kept confidential. It would be a disastrous outcome if the Germans found a hidden Jew. Everyone in the household, not only the Jew, but also the whole Polish family would be killed and the house burnt down. Poor Kazimierz. How badly he must have felt upon hearing these scary words of warning from the village bailiff. Not letting anyone notice what impression this made on him, he talked with neighbors carefree. Inside he was shaken and confused. Barbara came and told us about this horrible meeting.

Hearing this story, we felt very bad and my sister Anna tried to ease her fears and explained to her that Germans only came to a place when someone was denounced and it was unrealistic to suggest that they might go from one house to another. We did not know if any of my sister's words convinced her and calmed her fears. She left and we remained with our less optimistic thoughts. We deliberated about why she had come to tell us this. Was this merely because she wanted to share her worries with us or was she trying to prepare us for the ending of our stay? On the other hand, how could they ask us to leave this place? This would endanger them even more if the Germans caught us. With this, a morbid thought crept into our mind. Could they use the services of the village bailiff and have us disappear. Right away we dismissed this as insane. They were deeply religious people and they would never commit murder.

CHAPTER 26

The time was dragging on without any new excitement. This was good and we did not complain. What was important was that the farmers kept us and never mentioned this meeting again. They were busy tending their farm and selling grocery products to the villagers. We did not think about anything

special. We lived in some kind of lethargy, until a new horror descended upon us.

The entrance to the attic was through an opening covered with a square board, which we locked inside the attic. Attached to the attic was a ladder, which was used to go to the attic. There were no stairs. When the farmer brought us food, he knocked and we opened up the bolt. My brother heard steps on the ladder and being sure that this was the farmer, he opened the cover without waiting to hear the knock. There was a stranger standing there. Realizing his mistake, he quickly put down the cover but this was too late. The stranger saw him, not my brother's face exactly, but his legs. This was enough. The man who saw him was their neighbor, Jozek Ryczek. The neighbor wanted to borrow the ladder and since the farmer was not at home, he went to take the ladder by himself. He had difficulties to move this ladder because we locked the cover inside the attic. This was a very serious situation, which could have easily turned catastrophic. When the farmer brought us our meal, we told him about this incident. The farmers went out of their mind. They did not know what to do or how to prevent tragic consequences. The situation was critical for us and for our saviors. It was true that the neighbor was their friend. He would not denounce them, but he could pressure them to go to the village bailiff and turn us over to the Polish police.

We did not believe that our farmers wanted us to be killed. For a long time, they endangered their lives and all their efforts that they put into saving us would be in vain. There was another possibility. Jozek could start to gossip and tell his relatives or friends that someone was hiding in the Kazimierz house. This gossip would spread, as what usually happens with gossip, until it would reach our farmers enemy (or the village bailiff) who would denounce him. In any case, the situation was not too hopeful. Again, our reasoning came back to the morbid thought. They could not ask us to leave because if we were caught by the Germans and tortured we could reveal the

place where we were hidden and who was hiding us. What remained was one solution. To save their lives they would have to get rid of us. Was there any other solution? We tried to push away these macabre thoughts. Again and again, we considered all possibilities. One conclusion contradicted the other. All night we did not sleep. We whispered softly about our serious situation and were prepared for the worst to come. This was mental torture, which we created for ourselves.

Barbara and Kazimierz also had a sleepless night talking over and over about this new situation. We never could guess what kind of alternatives they considered. We only knew about the decision and plan chosen by them.

The first thing that our farmers did, before finding a way to get out of this mess, was to ask us to go to another hiding place in case the neighbor went upstairs to find out what was going on the attic while they would be away. The neighbor could also stay near the house and eavesdrop in an attempt to hear any voices or other noise. This was a precaution, but it did not solve the problem. What if the neighbor were to gossip? This could create serious implications. The new hiding place prepared for us was also on attic above a little storage building, where the farmers kept potatoes.

This attic was very small, but was enough space for five people to sit. The farmer cut out a hole in the floor of the attic through, which in case of an emergency, we could slip down to the storage space. The space was full with potatoes and we would be covered with potatoes to conceal us. We began to move into this new hiding place.

The farmers, their daughter Irenka and their son Tadeusz were watching to see if anyone was coming. In haste, one by one, we walked rather than ran to the new place so as not to be seen by any strangers. We were glad that our saviors did not ask us to leave and nobody cared that the place was livable only for a short time. We were crammed into this scanty place, frightened about what could happen to us. The new hiding place did not give us security because it did not remove the urgent problem; it was only some kind of a safeguard.

Barbara was not educated, but she possessed common sense and was smart and courageous. She talked over with her husband how to deal with this problem and finally she had an idea how to handle this. Her plan was to talk to the neighbor who saw my brother, his name was Jozek Ryczek and to tell him who was upstairs in such away that he would believe in her story.

During the war between Germany and Russia, some divisions of Ukrainians joined the Germans because of their hatred of communism. Being strongly nationalistic, they believed that Hitler would give them freedom and an independent state. The Ukrainians were very disappointed when the Germans put

them into camps and killed them. Many Ukrainians escaped from the camps to join the Russian army or become deserters. They walked through the Polish villages. Sometimes, the Poles let them sleep over night or gave them some food.

Kazimierz agreed to her plan. Barbara did not give it a second thought and right away she invited Jozek to her house. She gave him some vodka to drink and she drank too. She used to drink sometimes when she was depressed and drinking put her in a good mood and eased her fears of hiding Jews. Kazimierz never drank vodka. During their light social conversation she did not let him notice that she knew he saw someone upstairs. She mentioned innocently that a Ukrainian came to them who was nearly starving and begged them to give him something to eat and to spend the night. He was also tired and exhausted. His look was frightened and they took pity of him and let him spend the night in the attic. The Ukrainian was very thankful and gave them some of his clothes. Barbara took out a man's old clothes to show him as a proof of her story. She took a pair of pants and she gave it to the neighbor Jozek as a present and asked him not to mention this to anyone including his family because they could have serious problems. He promised to keep the secret. When after a couple of days nothing special happened, we were aloud to go back to our former hiding place.

Jozek kept his promise because nobody in the village ever mentioned this incident, but we could never be sure if he believed in Barbara's story or if he suspected something. However, one thing was for sure: from this moment on, we lost our piece of mind. We were more neurotic and our imagination played games with us. During the night, when the wind was blowing and was shaking the branches, we were awakened and frightened because it seemed to us that someone was coming to the house to look for us. When we heard steps outside the house, we got suspicious and were thinking that maybe Jozek was watching our house and eavesdropping to find out who was really in the attic. We tried to block out these thoughts of suspicion.

CHAPTER 27

Life was going on. People on the outside world lead a normal life with all of its problems. We were not dead, but were also not alive in the full meaning of the word. We were living in stagnation, reduced to the most primitive elements of human existence. We ate and slept.

Days were long and nights were long time was moving so slowly that it seemed to us that it was standing still. This was only our imagination because in reality, time was passing by quickly and the seasons followed one after another.

We were waiting for good news and hoping that the end of the war would soon come, but many times we lost hope. Barbara's visits did not make us too happy, especially considering the news that some Jews were caught in hiding. These visits made us nervous.

Barbara was in low spirits when she heard bad news. People in the village did not read newspapers and all their knowledge about the war was based on rumors and when she heard people saying that Germany would win the war she believed this and became frustrated and immediately ran to us to share her worries. We tried to persuade her that this was impossible since so many countries were fighting Germany. Our source of information, which we used to get from reading the German newspaper, ended abruptly. Barbara stopped buying it for us because the salesman, seeing a peasant buying a German newspaper, got suspicious and asked her for whom was she buying it and she was afraid that this could give him a clue that she is buying the German newspaper for a Jew. This important source of information was not available to us anymore, though the Germans did not write always the truth. One had to read between the lines, but still provided us with news about the war.

Now we lived in complete ignorance of what was going on the front. All of our information we received from Barbara was unreliable most of the time. Kazimierz never visited us for conversation and he never brought us any scary

stories. He only brought us food and took out the bucket containing our products of excretion. He was a quiet, honest and hard working. We never heard them to quarrel, use vulgar words or fight with their children. It was a good and peaceful family.

For a while, our life was uneventful. However, one day we had some excitement. Our farmer's mother came to visit them. When she entered the house, she felt drops of water falling on her head. Accidentally, one of us overturned a glass of water and the water was dripping down.

The grandmother was surprised and asked her son Kazimierz why the water was coming down from the attic. He said that this might be a cat urinating. She was an old lady and of course she believed in his explanation. We were lucky that this happened to Kazimierz's mother and not a neighbor or a villager coming to buy groceries. This was a small incident, but could have a more serious implication.

CHAPTER 28

There was only one change in our life upon the arrival of a new season. The fall ended and the winter began. This was the winter of 1943. The warm weather became cold and frosty. The days were short and the night set in very early. There were more hours of darkness.

I could not hear the chirping and singing of the birds anymore and I missed it very much. The roads were covered with heavy snow and this prevented villagers from coming to buy groceries in our farmers' little store. I lost my chance to get some entertainment while listening to their gossip. Inside, the house was quiet, but a little noise came from outside when children were laughing and screaming while playing with snow. There were also dogs barking. Winters in Poland are generally very severe, but that winter in the attic was also extremely cold. There was a lot of snow, freezing temperatures and strong

winds. Around the roof there was an open space through which a constant flow of fresh and aromatic air came into the attic.

Also, the square opening in the roof, which supplied our dwelling with light was very much appreciated by us. We did not have to light the kerosene lamp anymore. These two accommodations were a blessing to us during spring, autumn and summer. However, the picture was different in winter with the strong winds blowing the snow into the attic or the cold air coming into and making the temperature freezing. To prevent the snow from falling inside, we filled the openings with hay and straw. This did not protect us from the cold. Picture us sitting on the hay without any movement in the attic where the temperature was below zero. Some nights were extremely cold and our farmer used to check on us in the morning to see if we were not frozen to death. If we had been old people our chance for survival would be minimal, but being young and healthy was a great plus in maintaining some body heat.

Having very warm winter clothes and eiderdown covers played a very big role in staying alive. We were sitting on heavy layers of heaps of hay, dressed very warmly with winter coats, woolen hats, woolen gloves, woolen scarves and covered with eiderdowns. We even joked that after the war, we would build a monument for the geese because they supplied the down, which saved us from freezing to death. We laughed from the joke. Laughter was an unusual thing in our circumstances. We were deprived of the healing power of the laughter.

It was not easy to endure the wintertime. We were eating in gloves and we did not even wash our faces. The cold was such an inconvenience. As I have previously mentioned, the daily light was for a much shorter time and this meant more hours sitting in darkness and more hours of sleeping. In the daytime, there was less light than before because the opening was filled with straw and hay, but it was still not complete dark. Sleeping for us was a blessing, but sometimes I could not fall asleep. I was lying quietly, my eyes closed, not thinking about anything. I stopped complaining long ago We looked a little

strange: a group of people bundled up in untidy clothes with pale faces and bewildered looks in their eyes. We were like animals that hibernate during the winter season.

One day, I got a cold with high fever. We had a thermometer, which we took with us. I took my temperature; it was really very high. We did not even tell our farmers that I was sick because she would get frightened to have a sick person in hiding. She could not call a doctor. I was very hot and wanted to uncover myself, so my brother Leo watched me all night to make sure that I did not throw away the cover in being afraid that I might catch pneumonia. Miraculously, after several days I got well, without aspirin or other drugs for colds. I did not even have tea or any other fluid to drink during the day or night.

While describing our life in hiding, it is hard to recall all the small details because time has erased them from my memory. I am sure that at the time when they took place, they were very important to us, but with time passing, they started to be less and less important and finally they disappeared from our memory. The same was true about feelings. How hard to reproduce from memory and recall the past, which every minute, every hour and every day was abundant with various kinds of feelings, worries, despair and hope. However, some events lingered in my memory and remained so fresh that it felt almost as though they had occurred just yesterday and time did not erase them.

CHAPTER 29

This winter, a very serious occurrence took place, which could have had severe consequences. We used to pay some money for the food. After a period of time we ran short of cash and had no money left to pay for our board. So my sister Anna decided to go to a woman named Debra to sell a golden necklace. In Debica we befriended Debra, a Polish woman who was married to a Jewish man who converted to Catholicism. However, this fact did not make any difference to the

Germans. To them, he was a Jew. They put him in the ghetto and he was taken away with the transport of Jews to an unknown place. I mention this because my sister did not fear to go to her and trusted that she would not denounce her. Barbara and her son Tadeusz drove my sister in a wagon to Debica. When they came to the town, my sister Anna went to the Polish friend to sell her the necklace. Barbara and Tadeusz waited for her. My sister spent a long time in the house of this Polish woman because the woman had not enough money to buy the necklace and had to go to someone to borrow the needed money. This transaction took more time than expected because of this complication. Barbara and Tadeusz waited for a long time and Anna did not come back. They started to worry about what could have happened to her. They waited a little longer, but in vain. She did not show up.

It was getting late so they jumped quickly to the conclusion that the woman had betrayed her and called the police or Gestapo and my sister was arrested. They were sure that this was the case. They did not wait any longer and drove home in a hurry. Barbara, short of breath came to us upstairs right away. Before she even started to talk, looking at her face, we recognized right away that something terrible happened. Her face was pale and her eyes had an expression of fear. With trembling voice she said that the Germans had caught my sister Anna and she lamented about the grave situation, which we were in. She was so sure that this had happened that she did not even mention the possibility that perhaps Anna had not been caught. The bad news shocked us so much that we did not even ask her how it happened. Hopelessly, we looked at each other. There was nothing to say. We could not think rationally. We were all in some kind of panic.

We cried and could not find any words to ease the fears of Barbara. We knew all too well that the Gestapo had successful methods of breaking people's spirits and by torturing people, they were able to find out the place where they were hidden and by whom. Not only we were thinking about this possibility, but

also our farmers. No wonder Barbara was out of her mind. Barbara left the attic. We were in despair and waited the worst to come. We did not know what our farmers had decided to do with us. Throwing us out was not the best idea. We could be also caught and this would also put them also in grave danger. However, we also knew that we could not stay here any longer. And again a thought, which once tormented us, revived: could they get rid of us in a less human way? Would they kill us in order to protect themselves and their family?

Killing us would not solve the farmers' dangerous situation. Once my sister told the Gestapo the truth, they would kill the farmers and their children and burn the house. It seemed to us there was no way to solve this difficult problem. It was very cold, but we were sitting frozen not only from low temperature, but also from anxiety and fear, which chilled the blood in our veins.

After some hours of uncertainty about what could happen to us and completely without hope, the unexpected thing happened. Barbara came upstairs to us and she was very excited. Her face was flushed from strong emotions and she cried out several times that our sister came back and that she was downstairs in her apartment. We could not believe what we heard. It felt like a dream, but it was reality. My sister came upstairs. She took out a bundle of money wrapped in a newspaper and gave it to Barbara.

Barbara embraced my sister and kissed her. "You are my millions of dollars," she cried out emotionally. "Never again will I let you go out for money." She took the money, which my sister gave her and threw it around.

We experienced mental torture of despair, fear and imagined the worst things that would happen to us. These were our feelings and emotions of uncertainty concerning what the next moment holds for us. Our fears were not supported by concrete facts because we did not know what really happened to our sister. My sisters' experiences were real and not imaginary. As I wrote before, my sister had to stay much longer than expected in the house of the

Polish acquaintance because of some delay in selling the chain. Being glad that she sold the chain and got some money, she left the house and went to the place where Barbara and Tadek were supposed to wait for her and did not expect any trouble. One could imagine her disappointment and frustration in not finding them waiting for her. She could not believe her eyes and thought that maybe she made a mistake and went to the wrong place. She looked around and strained her eyes, but in vain. There was no sign of them. Bewildered, she had no choice but to walk to the village. She walked, but was not sure which direction to go.

After walking for a short time, she noticed a peasant driving by. She stopped him and asked if he could give her a ride. The peasant agreed to take her. My sister was thankful for the ride. Happily, she climbed the wagon and sat down next to the peasant. My sister did not only look non-Jewish, but she looked like a peasant dressed in Barbara's dress with a scarf on her head. They had a nice conversation and in the middle of their conversation she made a terrible blunder about some Christian holiday. Her ignorance caught him by surprise and he looked at her suspiciously. He even hinted, more or less, that he knew of her being Jewish. She realized that to continue driving with him would put her in a dangerous situation. How could she trust this strange peasant? He could take her to the police station. Not waiting any moment longer, she jumped down from the wagon. Many times, Poles catching Jews turned them in to the police or the Gestapo. This peasant could be an honest person without any bad intentions, but my sister did not want to take the chance. She started to walk very fast, almost running. She listened to see if someone was running after her. She did not hear any steps behind her. It was fortunate that she knew the directions to our village. At the beginning of the conversation, she asked the peasant about directions.

It was winter and there was a lot of snow. The temperature was below zero. It was freezing with strong winds blowing the snow and walking was difficult. She walked and walked and she realized that she had only a vague

idea how to reach our village, even though the peasant told her how to reach it. She became very tired and her hands and legs were ice cold. Her face was burning from the blowing cold wind. She had a strong desire to sit down and rest. However, her reason warned her not to do this and to give into this temptation. She tried hard to overcome her impulse because she knew well that if she would sit down even for a short time she would fall asleep and this meant that she would freeze to death. She walked for miles completely exhausted and nearly collapsing.

She distinctly heard a voice repeating many times to go forward and not to stop. She looked around and did not see anyone. Obviously, this was her imagination, which played tricks with her. It was hard to understand by reason only how could she endure it walking so many miles in such bad weather conditions and how she managed to find our village and the house of our farmers. One had to believe that a good angel led her all the way to our farmer's house. Once again, a miracle happened and once again, God had saved our saviors and us.

CHAPTER 30

A very visible indication that there was some good news about military gains by the allies was when Kazimierz brought us bigger portions of food and even a piece of pork. However, the piece was too small to divide among all of us so my family gave the whole piece to me. Eating pork was forbidden in Jewish dietary laws and anytime I ate it or pieces of lard I had a feeling of guilt though I knew that in our circumstances, it is not a sin.

When the war took a better turn, our hope was increasing day by day, though our fear did not end and we could not predict what kind of complications could take place in our existence. We had to live from one day to the next and pray to God that no misfortune would happen to us.

The war was going on and we anxiously waited for good news about the war and our farmers waited too. It was true that the war took a little better turn

for the allies, but it still did not end. More importantly, our saviors were in a better mood in believing that the war would end soon. Our life seemed the same, one day was alike the other with same daily routines, which were minimal. The good news about the German losses made us happy and our hope for surviving grew stronger. The light at the end of the tunnel began to twinkle. To sustain our hope that the war would not last long meant a lot for us. Hope gives people the strength to endure even the harshest conditions of life. Hope is a vital force that can produce miracles. One who loses hope loses everything. Our feeling of hope went through different stages and grades. The intensity of hope was changing constantly according to the various circumstances. It grew either stronger or weaker, but we never lost hope completely.

After staying in hiding for such a long period of time, I got adjusted to our miserable vegetation. My life in the attic started to become a norm for me. I grew accustomed to my daily small routines. Human instinct for survival is very strong and in order to stay alive, one had to adapt to the existing conditions and to cope with any circumstances that came along.

When there were no strangers in our farmers' house, we talked or rather whispered, very softly. We always had to be very careful because someone passing the house could hear us. We were always uneasy in thinking that the neighbor Jozek might stand by the house and eavesdrop.

When our hope of surviving the war started to become more promising, it was very interesting to notice that the main topic in our conversations with my sisters was food. We did not talk about any serious matters; we did not talk about our situation or the past. We talked about what kind of food we were going to eat, what kind of dishes would we cook when the war was over and we would be free. By talking about food, we strengthened our belief that soon the war would come to an end and Germany would be defeated. This could also have a deeper explanation that may have indicated that food was the most important

factor in human life. Upon the satisfaction of basic needs such as hunger, one would be more apt to focus on their spiritual needs.

Time was passing at a snails pace. We were waiting for the war to come to its final conclusion. There was a lot of activity in the sky. Airplanes were flying day and night and there was fierce fighting on all fronts with the allies having an upper hand.

We did not get any detailed or reliable information. We got only little bits of information from our saviors who, like other peasants, never read newspapers. They got their news from neighbors who, in turn, got news from peasants who went to town where people read newspapers or even listened to radios, which were broadcasting news from England. Villagers altered the news and they added their own opinions. But we wanted to believe in good news. Our farmers believed in the encouraging news and this fact had a significant influence on their behavior toward us. Barbara paid us short visits and each time, we were less and less upset. She was more relaxed and less moody and her eyes had a soft expression. There were favorable signs on the horizon, but still, our existence remained on the same level without any change.

The winter was nearing its end. The days were longer and the snow started to melt. The birds started to return from warmer countries and the flowers started to burst forth and blossom. The earth awakened from the long winter sleep and the renewal of nature began. The spring came and with its entire splendor, brought forth new life to nature. We survived the winter and welcomed the new season. We had the hardship of the wintertime behind us. We put away our warm clothes and warm covers and were so glad to be able to sit in light clothes and not to be all wrapped up. We took out the straw and hay from the openings and from the square window. It was so good to have more light and not to freeze. Now we did not have to sleep for so many hours or to sit in darkness. More people frequented the house of our farmers. Once again, I could engage myself in my old entertainment. I listened to the conversations of the

farmers coming to buy groceries. Even the dogs were more alive and barked louder. Also, the children were making more noise than usual while playing outside. It was spring 1944.

CHAPTER 31

The war was still being fought, but allied forces were moving forward with successful military operations and the Germans were getting some beatings and had great losses. The news was heart warming but for us, there was still danger looming and we could not predict what the nearest future might bring. We had to live from one day to the next without speculating. Every day, which passed quietly and without nerve breaking excitement, was a blessing. However, living for a long time in peaceful vegetation was not meant for us. Our fate was to be exposed once again to a frightening experience.

Our farmers used to produce home made whiskey, called "bimber." Though this was illegal and punishable by law, all farmers in the village were engaged in the production of "bimber." The authorities knew about this production and in order to stop it, they made inspections from time to time in farmer's houses to find proof of their illegal whisky making. One day, a rumor was spreading that inspectors, Poles and Germans together, would go from one house to another in order to look for whisky.

The rumors proved to be true. Three inspectors went from one house to another in search of hidden whisky. Peasants used to hide the bottles of whisky deep in the piles of straw or hay, which they had in barns or in attics. So the first place from which they would start their inspection would be the attic. Our farmers were frightened to death upon hearing this news. Barbara came upstairs and we knew right away that there was some sort of emergency. She told us right away to go to our hiding place. In a hurry, we moved to the hiding place under the double floor with all of our belongings. We did not leave any

trace that someone had stayed there. We straightened out the hay before we crawled into our hiding place.

As was mentioned before, the farmer had built a double floor. We lied down in the space between the two floors and the farmer put back the layers of hay to cover the floor. Our hearts were beating fast. We were lying motionless and were even afraid to breathe. The situation was really dangerous because while looking for the whisky, they could easily notice that at the end of the floor, there were two floors. If they noticed it, they could look inside through the opening suspecting that the farmer hid whisky inside. They would be surprised when instead of whisky, they would find hiding Jews. One could easily guess what would happen. While lying inside, we thought about this possibility. We were trembling from fear and waiting for the worst to come. Every minute felt like an hour. It was hard to tell how long we waited for the inspectors to come upstairs. We heard steps and were sure that inspectors were coming. This was a morbid feeling. To our relief, there were no inspectors coming upstairs, but only Barbara. She told us what had happened. The farmers were out of their mind watching the inspectors coming. They were standing on the steps ready to go into the house. Unexpectedly, one of the inspectors changed his mind and said to the two other officials that it was too late and that he had no time so they had to skip this house. The others agreed because they were glad to go home and all of them left the place. This happy ending could again be considered a miracle. Perhaps a good angel was watching over us again this time. Barbara and Kazimierz were overwhelmed with joy at seeing them leaving the premises. Also, with great joy, we came out of hiding, straightened out our bodies and breathed easier. Once more, we escaped the danger of being caught.

The rest of the springtime passed without any changes in our daily existence. The weather became warmer. The sun rose higher in the sky. A new season was coming and we still were in hiding. It was summer the 1944. The war was coming to an end. The allied forces were winning and the scanty news, which

we got about the war, made us happy. Also, Barbara and Kazimierz were more relaxed and they were in a good mood that was shown in their behavior. Again, our portions of food got larger and sometimes included a piece of pork.

We were very pleased when Kazimierz brought a full pail with warm water and a piece of soap to wash our bodies. It was the first wash after the long winter and spring. We had to be very careful not use too much water by one person and to leave enough water for everyone. My sisters also washed our underwear with the water left from potato peeling and because it was very hot it dried fast and it felt good to get rid of the dirt from our bodies and to wear clean underwear. In wintertime, we washed only our hands. In the spring, we also washed our faces. Two times during our stay, we washed our bodies during the two summers, which we spent in hiding place. Surprisingly, we did not suffer from skin disorders such as irritation, inflammation or rash. Even my hair, washed only twice during our stay there was healthy and shining, maybe because I spent hours combing it just to kill the time. The smallest activity was important to me and added some flavor to the monotony of my existence.

When listening to the talk of the peasants coming to our farmers, I noted that more and more the subject of war came up. Even by straining my ears I could not catch the full sentences, only fragments. What I heard was that Germany was withdrawing its forces and that the war was approaching its end.

Our yearning to be free grew with the good prognosis of the victory of the allied forces and Germany's defeat. At the same time, we were not out of the woods. The fear that something unexpected might destroy our hope was rooted in the back of our minds. The threat was similar to the idea of someone playing with fire. There was a possibility that they could get burned. In our existence, the smallest mistake could bring disaster. Even a small and innocent event could end in tragedy. Our imagination and mistrust added only fuel to our fears. There were many times when we thought that our neighbor Jozek Ryczek was standing in front of the house and listening. Our whispering became so soft

that it could hardly be understood. During the night, hearing the wind blowing and moving the branches of the trees, we continued to imagine that the Gestapo was coming to catch us. We were subjected to unrealistic and realistic fears. These fears were entangled and many times, it was hard to differential them. We were caught in a web of different thoughts, emotions and feelings. The best remedy was not to think, but to escape to the realm of fantasy and dreams.

One day, our fear of unexpected events materialized when a group of German soldiers came to our farmers' house to stay for several days. One of the Germans who knew Polish said to our farmers that they wished to sleep in the attic on the hay. This announcement made our farmers tremble inside. They could not show on the outside how their request had made them feel somehow. They did not want to invoke any suspicion. The situation looked very serious, but Barbara did not lose her self-confidence and her mind began to work fast in an attempt to find a solution to this problem.

She came up with an original and clever idea, but now she had to introduce her suggestion to the Germans in such a way that the Germans would agree to her suggestions. At the same time, to avert any suspicion that her objection of their sleeping upstairs had some reason, she advised them to sleep in the barn instead of the attic. Her arguments were that the attic was very hot with no air and it was more convenient to sleep in the hay in the barn and that the place was spacious and airy.

The Germans thanked her for her good advice and gladly agreed to sleep in the barn. She felt a great sense of relief from the extreme tension inside her. Not wasting any time, she went upstairs to the attic to tell us about the visit with the Germans. However, she had no time to go into details because she had to carry down hay in order to place it in the barn since there was no hay in the barn, only straw.

She prepared the barn for the Germans when they would come to sleep there. The Germans slept in the barn for several nights and were very satisfied with

this arrangement. During the day they stayed in the house. They cooked, they ate and they rested. It was hard to guess who they were. Was their division destroyed while they survived and were aiming to join other units? Were they deserters? Their stay made us very nervous understandably. We were extremely careful not to make so much as the slightest noise. All day, we were sitting almost motionless, not whispering. Kazimierz took special caution when bringing food for us upstairs. He brought us some soup that was cooked by the soldiers. The soup tasted very good. It was farina with raisins. This meal was a nice treat.

This was a comical situation that was spiced with a dangerous element. Downstairs, the German soldiers cooked some soup, which was later eaten by the Jews hiding upstairs. Of course, the German soldiers did not suspect anything. We heard the German soldiers talking, laughing and walking. The sound of the German language alone made us uncomfortable and frightened us. The days of their stay were nerve racking and when they left, we were relieved and our farmers were relieved too. Our farmers were now free from fear that the soldiers could spot Kazimierz climbing the ladder to deliver us food. They experienced great tension and stress during the stay of the Germans in their home. They were afraid that we would cough or make some noise what would attract the attention of the soldiers. The farmers regained their peace of mind.

Our life returned to its normal course. As before, I was waiting for the meals, combing my hair, playing a game of chess or was listening to the singing of the birds and the noise of children playing outside. On a daily basis, I would continue to listen to the conversations of the peasants standing in the entrance hall.

When we heard steps on the ladder during the day in a time when Kazimierz was not coming to bring our meals, we knew that Barbara was coming with some good news. Now it was different than before when Barbara was depressed in thinking that the war would never end. At this time, her visits had made us

nervous and we were glad when Barbara would not visit because every time she used to come, we knew beforehand that she would deliver us some bad news. As was previously mentioned, this news consisted of some of the following ideas: Germany would win the war or that Gestapo was finding Jews in hiding places? The subject was always the same with minimal variation in content. Now, the picture changed altogether and she would bring us news that the Germans suffered great losses and the Russians from the east were pushing the German army closer and closer to the German borders. More and more airplanes were roaming the skies. The traffic in the skies had become greater. We heard the sound of machine guns and the explosions of bombs. This was a sign that the front was near us and that there was a fierce fight going on. The Germans retreated from their positions and this referred to in the German language as "Rickzug," which can be translated as "retreat."

CHAPTER 32

When bombs started to fall upon our village and some houses were on fire, there was panic in the village. Frightened peasants left their houses and ran away to hide in the fields or other villages, which were not exposed to the bombing. We could not run away. We were not in a position to leave the house because of the risk of being seen by the villagers.

The peasants in the village would wonder whom these strange people were and from where did they come. It was easy to recognize that we were Jews who left some hiding place. Our faces were pale, my brothers were unshaven and our clothes were dirty and wrinkled. We decided to stay disregarding the danger of being exposed to bombing. There was still a chance of surviving because we believed it to be impossible that bombs would hit every house. We hoped that our house would be not destroyed, but by leaving the place we would be in great danger of being denounced by the peasants. We had no choice but to stay and hope for the best. Our farmer Kazimierz did not want us to be killed by the

bombs. He hid us for so long and in the last minute, when the war was coming to an end, it would be a shame to perish. All of the efforts, problems and fears that our farmers experienced during our stay with them would be wasted. They knew well as we knew how dangerous it would be to suddenly to appear in the village where people knew each other. However, he also knew that the village was under the German fire and that many houses were burning. Barbara, with the children left the house, but our farmer remained to do something in order to protect us from the falling bombs.

There was, on the premises, a shed where the farmers stored tools, brooms, brushes, hoes and rakes for example. This was the place where the farmer dug an underground bunker for us to stay inside in case the house would burn and to protect us from explosions of the bombs. We went inside and the opening of bunker was covered with a board and tools were put on the top. When Kazimierz finished the job, he left the house in hurry. We were left by ourselves. All of the neighbors ran away as well and the whole village was deserted. One could assume that we were the only ones who remained in the village. We were laying underground and listening to the sporadic sound of exploding bombs. The airplanes were flying very low above our house. When an airplane was passing the roar was deafening. Squeezed in this small place, we were apprehensive of even the smallest noise from outside.

After some hours of being in the bunker, we did not feel good. There was no air to breathe so we went out to breath some air. It was completely quiet for a while so we thought that it was save to be outside. We thought that there would be no more bombing and that there was no danger to threaten us. Our thinking and calculations were totally wrong.

Late in the night, we heard steps and voices. We started to become nervous. "What could it be?" we wondered. As time passed, the steps and voices grew louder and louder. We were stricken with horror when we recognized that the language spoken was German. The steps of the Germans grew closer and closer

and we could distinctly hear their conversation. Now we knew for sure that German soldiers were coming to our farmers' premises. In a hurry, we went to our underground bunker and put the cover on the top. Motionless we were listening to what was going on. The German soldiers came and they were walking in the garden and talking. From their conversation, we figured out that they intended to stay on the premises. We heard that they were digging into the ground and we heard knocking and pounding. It looked as if they were building something or installing a military base. The soldiers did not sleep all night and neither did we. They worked intensively.

We did not work with our hands, but with our minds. This was the most dangerous situation that we found ourselves faced with during the whole time we were in hiding. We thought feverishly about what to do. We knew that in the morning, the German soldiers would definitely uncover our bunker and find us inside. One could easily picture this scene: The German soldiers ordering us to go out from the bunker and torturing us before killing us on the spot. The Germans would probably take revenge because they were losing the war. Even if they were not members of the Nazis, they would not have mercy. We could not take any chances in counting on their mercy. This was a gruesome picture that we had before our eyes.

It was obvious that we could not remain inside the bunker. This would be a clear indication that we were Jews in hiding. Germans in general did not recognize from appearance who is Jewish or who is Polish. For them everyone was the same. One choice was left, to go out from the bunker and to pretend that we were the owners of this farm. Luckily, there were no neighbors to see us. All of the houses were empty. So we started, one by one, to leave the bunker. Because the bunker was in the shed, we could leave the bunker not being noticed by the German soldiers. It was dawn and the soldiers were busy installing cannons, probably to establish a military position. First, my sister Anna came out from the bunker. The soldiers did not pay any attention to her. She went

to the house and dressed herself in Barbara's dress and wrapped her head with a scarf. She looked exactly like a peasant. She milked a cow and gave milk to the soldiers. She had problems milking the cow, but she managed to milk the cow. The German soldiers were convinced that she was the daughter of the owner of this farm. Later, I emerged out of the bunker. Afterwards, my other sister came out. Fortunately, the German soldiers were so busy that they did not take any notice of us. Even if they did see us, they would think of us as being the children of the farmers. They had more important things on their minds than to observe us. I was blond, petite and looked like a Polish girl.

I was not afraid that the German soldiers would recognize me as being Jewish so I took the courage to approach the Germans and talk to them in order to divert their attention from looking at my brothers who were unshaven with pale faces. Their appearance could evoke suspicion that something fishy was going on. We had to play roles alike on stage. With a very innocent voice I said in Polish to the Germans, "please give me a shovel; we would dig a bunker in the field to protect us from falling bombs." What I said did not make too much sense. I thought that they probably would not understand Polish anyway, but I was wrong. One soldier knew Polish and translated it into the German language. They laughed heartily and ignored my request. I had good intentions, but my talking to the German soldiers had an adverse effect. Now they were more aware of our presence. They looked at my brothers and luckily; they saw only their backs. What they saw was so ridiculous that they started to laugh. One of my brothers pulled out a goat from the barn and quickly left the premises. The other brother took out a large fat pig, but my brother had some difficulty pulling it out from the barn. This was a very stubborn and very difficult pig. The soldiers watched my brother's struggle with the fat pig and had a good laugh. One said to the other, "look at the stupid and ignorant peasants." Bombs could have killed us at any moment, but evidently we gave the impression that we cared more about the pig and goat than about ourselves.

All of us left the place as fast as we could and were happy that the German soldiers took us for the children of the owners of the farm and did not suspect that we were Jews. Even if they had not realized that we were Jews in hiding we had leave the premises. It was too dangerous to play the role of the owners of the farm. A stranger could pass the farm and see us or a neighbor could come back. We could not predict what could happen. It was true that at first moment, they took us for the owners of the farm, but everything went in such a fast pace that they did not have much time to observe us, but the situation could change if we stayed any longer. They might wonder why we looked so shabby and recognize that we were not Poles and they would wonder where our parents were. We also realized by leaving the premises, we would be exposed to the view of the villagers, which could put us in a risky position. Between the two evils, we chose the second choice, which looked a little less threatening. We were counting on the confusion and panic existing in the village caused by the steady bombing, explosions and houses burning.

The first thing that my brothers did was to let the goat and pig loose. The pig behaved well. He just stretched himself across the ground and closed his eyes, but the goat had no intention of leaving my brother Sam. He ran after him like a dog after his master. For a long time he ran after him. It was hard to explain why, but he finally got tired and stopped running. We ran and ran. The bombs were falling so we did not have any choice but to run to the fields. There were piles of cut grains. We hid ourselves under the heaps of grain sheaves to protect us from falling bombs. This was not the best idea. The piles of grain started to burn when hit by bombs. We heard the screams of peasants injured or even killed. We did not know who was bombing the place, the Germans or the Russians. It was obvious that the front was very close. We wondered why they bombed this particular village where there were no military forces or base nor any important military installments. The only sign of the Germans was the small group of German soldiers lodging on our farmers' premises. Why were they

targeting civilians? We did not find an explanation, but it was not time for any speculation. We were running for our lives and we could not lose any time. The noise of the airplanes flying so low over our heads was almost deafening to our ears.

We had to run away from the field. By staying there, we could be hit by bombs since this place was under fire. We ran and we heard the explosions of bombs. The bombs were falling close to us. Any minute we could be killed. Only by miracle, the bombs fell between us but not on us and luckily the shrapnel fell far away from us. My brother, who had some military experience, gave us orders for when to run and when to lie down. My dress was torn by a small piece of shrapnel, but it did not hurt me. We were fortunate not to be killed by the bombs. It was an extremely hot day. We perspired and our faces were flushed. We were thirsty as well. We did not feel hunger even though we did not eat for a whole day. We lost our shoes and we were running barefoot. The sun was burning and there were moments when I felt as if I were about to faint. From what source did our strength come? Was it our youth or the strong instinct for survival? We did not stop running until we came to the village proper.

Even being far from the open spaces of the fields, we were still within the sphere of bombardment. When we reached the village proper, it was deserted. There were no people or animals to be seen. After looking around, we noticed a little shelter. We listened carefully to make sure that nobody was inside. It was quiet; no sounds or voices were heard and we decided to go inside to find some protection from the exploding bombs. One could imagine our bewilderment upon seeing a young man sitting on a bench. It was too late to retreat so we greeted him and sat down on the bench. We were completely exhausted. Our faces were no longer pale, but flushed from the heat and running. The man observed us intensively. He scrutinized us from head to heel. We felt uncomfortable under his examining look. Our group looked suspicious with our dirty and wrinkled

clothes. My brothers were unshaven and we were barefoot because we lost our shoes while running from the bombing. At one point he asked us where we had come from. Leo made up a story that we came from another village. My brother's story did not sound believable. We did not look like peasants. He certainly recognized that we were Jews because he said to us that he was a democrat and that he lived in the United States for some time. His words indicated that he knew who we were, but obviously wanted to let us know that he would not denounce us. This time, we were lucky again to meet a decent man, but being caught in this kind of situation, we felt uneasy and did not want to prolong our stay there any longer. We could not trust him even though he was a seemingly decent person. Besides, another person could join him. We said good-bye to the young man and in a hurry, left the shelter. The young Pole did not stop us.

Again, we ran along the roads. The question arose of where to run. Suddenly, we noticed a young German running. We thought that he might be one of the German soldiers who came to our farmer's house to set up a military post and he was looking for us. We rationalized that in order to install a military position, they must have destroyed the stable and found the hiding place where we stayed at first when we came to our farmers to hide. We remembered that we left a Jewish prayer book inside. We were convinced that they found it and realized that we were Jews in hiding and not the owners of the farm. We experienced some frightening moments, but to our belief, the German soldier did not run after us, but in a completely different direction. Our reasoning was false. Our wild imagination had played games with us. Some of our fears were exaggerated, but others were realistic and based on concrete dangerous situations and occurrences. However, one could not blame us for being neurotic and, at many times, irrational. Living for so many years in constant tension and fear had modified our psyche.

We were extremely tired and our physical strength was completely exhausted. We could not run anymore. We dragged our aching legs and we suffered

from dehydration, our mouths were dry and burning. We noticed a house standing alone not far away. We came closer and looked inside. There was only an old woman and a little child. We wondered why they stayed home when everyone left the houses. This was not really our business. Because we were not afraid of an older woman or child we went inside and asked the woman for water. She did not ask any questions and gave us some water. Nothing in the world could be compared to the taste of this cold water. We drank and drank and felt renewed. The old woman had saved us from dehydration. When we saw how nice she was, my brother took the courage to ask her for a razor to shave. Again, she did not ask any questions and supplied my brothers with a razor. My brothers shaved themselves. It was hard to guess what was she thinking. Did she recognize that we were Jews? One could be sure that she pitied upon seeing a group of people in such distress. We were thankful for her kindness. We left the house a little refreshed, but we were still tired and we had no strength left to continue our running. Even slow walking was out of the question. We became oblivious to everything; we did not even react to hearing the sounds of explosions. One thing was on our minds to sit down and to rest. Not faraway, we spotted a small forest. With our last drop of strength, we managed to reach the forest.

We sat down and caught our breath. The trees were growing some distance from one another, but still there was shade. We rested our aching legs and our bodies became cool while sitting in the shade, but we did not enjoy our resting period for long. A young German soldier approached us and did not ask for permission, but unconventionally joined us. He simply sat down beside us. He took out a picture from his pocket and looked at it. His behavior perplexed us. He was a young adolescent. His blue eyes were so sad. He said to us that he was so young and he did not want to die. His young age was a good indication that the Germans, towards the end of the war, began to mobilize kids. Then

another soldier came and dragged him away perhaps because he did not want to get up or maybe he was injured and was weak. The soldier took him away by force.

After this encounter with the young German soldier we had a less pleasant one with other soldiers. Two German soldiers unnoticed came from behind us, and turned to my brothers saying: get up dirty Poles and come with us. They were losing the war and probably they wanted to take revenge by killing Poles. It was sure they did not have good intentions. Of course they did not suspect that we were Jews. Scared to death we girls started to cry, pleaded with them to have mercy, kissing their hands to let our brothers stay. I did not remember in what language we spoke to them, Polish or German. One of the soldiers a soft hearted one, obviously moved by our despair said to the other: come comrade, let them stay. It was also a possibility that he had sisters at home in our age. Hesitatingly the other soldier complied and they left. We felt relieved but it took us some time to regain our selves. This was a very scary experience.

We looked around and we saw more and more single German soldiers or groups of soldiers marching through the forest. This picture was an indication that the Russians had smashed the German units and dispersed German soldiers were retreating or running away. Maybe some of the soldiers lost contact with their divisions and they were trying to find them. They could also be deserters running away. We were delighted and high in spirit at witnessing the retreating German soldiers, but at the same time, we realized that remaining in the forest could expose us to the repetition of the former frightening encounter with the two German soldiers only this time, a potentially tragic outcome. It was very convenient to sit in the shade and avoiding meeting the returning home peasants. However, our reason dictated us to be cautious and to not give in to the urge to remain in the forest. We had to leave this forest right away so as not to gamble with fire. Ironically, we could be killed not as Jews, but as Poles. As I mentioned before, the Germans could not distinguish between a Jew and Pole.

In a hurry, we left the forest and started our new voyage to an unknown destination. Rested in the forest, we regained our strength a little. Again, we walked and walked this time. We did not run because there was no heavy bombardment anymore. It was silent and we only heard some explosions from time to time, but the sounds were no longer loud. The problem was that we did not know where to go. It looked like the village was not under aircraft attack anymore. From a far, we saw single peasants walking. This was a clear indication that some peasants were returning home. However, seeing the peasants even from a far made us very nervous. To be seen by the returning peasants put us again in a dangerous spot. Being recognized as Jews by peasants could have serious implications. It was enough that one of the peasants could be a Jew hater and denounce us to the retreating Germans. We had to take under consideration all these eventualities. We started to worry. We could not know for sure if the young Pole, whom we met in the shelter, did not mention us to others. Perhaps the old woman who gave us water could have mentioned to others that a group of strangers, who looked like Jews, were wandering around.

Again, we were faced with a tense situation and were not overreacting in being so concerned about the returning peasants because we knew very well how some Poles conducted themselves towards the Jews. It was obvious that we should keep away from the peasants by all means. It was a tremendous risk to be in the view of the villagers and we did not want to take this risk. There was only one thing to do in order to solve the problem of being seen by the villagers. We had to find another hiding place.

We had a vague hope that the German soldiers had left our farmers' premises. Logically thinking, we concluded that since the German soldiers were retreating en masse, there was a strong possibility that the German soldiers on our farmers' premises left. We thought that it would not make sense for them to stay if the others were retreating. It seemed to us that our reasoning was

correct so we decided to go back to our farmers' house to find out what had happened over there.

While walking toward our hiding place, we looked around to make sure that nobody was walking. Luckily, in this part of the village, we did not see any returning peasants and nobody was in the houses. When we came closer to our farmers' house, we strained our ears to catch the slightest sound, but there was the complete absence of any sound or noise. We took the courage to look inside the premises.

CHAPTER 33

We looked and looked and could not believe our eyes. It was too good to be true. There was not the slightest trace of the military installment. The German soldiers had left. The only remaining proof that the German soldiers had stayed there were some deep holes that were dug into the ground. How fortunate we were to be in our hiding place again. We did not go into the attic. We went to our first hiding place in the stable because in case of fire, it was easier to escape from the stable than from the upstairs attic. The hiding place looked the same as it did when we first left to go into the attic. All of the personal belongings that we left were there including our prayer book. We wrongly thought the German soldiers had found it. We prayed and thanked G-d for saving us until now and to save us in the future. How extremely glad we were that we were not exposed to the hostile world and to the danger of being seen by peasants. It was almost the end of the war and it would be a shame if we were killed. We could not afford to trust anybody. Here in the dark hiding place we were safe. It felt so good to be in the smelly, dark place separated from the dangers of the outside world.

Very tired and completely burned out from excitement and fears of all the events, which occurred to us all day long, we rested on the straw that covered the ground of the stable. The straw remained from the time we were staying in the stable. This time, the pungent smell of the cattle manure in the stable did not bother us at all. All day we did not eat because we spent our time running from one place to another, while bombs were falling around. The last thing on our minds was food. We were not hungry, but only very thirsty because it was a very hot day and while we were running and perspiring, our bodies got dehydrated. However, now that we were resting for a while in this dark stable, out of imminent danger and with increased prospects of survival, we became hungry and thirsty. My sister Anna left the hiding place and went to the house of our farmers to look for some food. She only found some stale bread and water. We ate some bread and drank water. It tasted very good and our hunger and thirst was partially satiated and our stomach pangs for food were lessened. Of course, we ate it in darkness for two reasons. First of all, we did not have a kerosene lamp to light and secondly, even if we had one, it was not safe to light it since it was night. Someone passing the house could see the light.

We were tense and we had an intuition that shortly something would happen what would bring a change in our life. We were anxiously waiting and could not sleep. All night, we listened with great intensity and concentration to the sounds coming from outside. The activity of airplanes flying over our place was increasing with every passing minute and the noise was so loud that was nearly hurting our ears. We also heard artillery shooting. This was a sign that the front must be very close and that the Russians were pushing back the German army. We sensed the war was in its last stage and that liberation was at the tip of a finger. However, on the other side we were reasoning that until the war ended, one could not know what turn it could take.

It was morning and our eyes were burning from lack of sleep and even though we were sleepy, we could not fall asleep from the tension. Suddenly, we

heard some voices and we became apprehensive. When the voices became louder, it seemed to us that the language spoken was Russian. Anxiously, we looked through the cracks between the boards of the stable wall and we liked what we saw. We saw two Russian soldiers of very short stature. This was a patrol of soldiers sent on a reconnaissance mission to check the terrain to see that there were no Germans left. My brother explained to us why the soldiers were so short. Short and slender soldiers were chosen for this kind of military operation because they were more agile and harder to spot.

We were exhilarated seeing these little Russian soldiers and could not believe our eyes. It was too good to be true, but this was reality and not a dream. I pinched myself to convince myself that this was not a dream.

We saw light at the end of the tunnel of our deprived and miserable existence. These short Russian soldiers were messengers of our forthcoming freedom and the liberation of Poland. In this moment of our intoxication, we did not realize or predict what kind of trials and tribulation were laying ahead of us. It was not the last stop in our journey to freedom.

Since there were no more Germans and only Russians, it was no use to stay any longer in the hiding place so we came out from the stable. We felt a little shaky because we did not sleep all night. When we were ready to walk out from the premises Barbara appeared unexpectedly. She was crying because she did not know what happened to her husband and children. She said that many people were injured or killed during the bombardment. During their escape from the village, she got separated from her family and lost track of them. Between her sobs, she was constantly repeating many times that she had lost her husband, her children and that we where her only children left alive. We tried to console her and to persuade her not jump to conclusions. She calmed down. Now came the time to take leave of her. Her coming back indicated that the other villagers might also return home. We had to leave the premises as soon as possible because by staying there, we would put our farmers in a very embarrassing situation. Our

presence there could easily reveal that they hid Jews and this fact would possess the potential of putting them in a difficult and unpleasant situation. We knew too well what was the general attitude of Poles to the Jews and besides, they could be thought to have some financial profit from this endeavor and be envied by the other villagers. In any case, our presence was undesirable. We hugged and kissed our savior Barbara and promised never to forget about them and to be in contact with them as soon as possible. Before our departure, she gave us something to drink and some stale bread.

Chapter 34

We walked through the roads of the village and we were glad not to meet any peasants. The houses were still empty. We walked and walked, but did not know where we were going. We came to the outskirts of the village. We noticed a large number of Russian soldiers lodging on a large meadow. We were tired of walking so we sat on the grass to rest our bodies. Besides, we felt safe being among Russian soldiers. We were naive not to know that being among soldiers during a war, especially for girls, was not safe. We girls did not realize that we were exposed to the danger of being raped, but because of a young Jewish soldier, this misfortune was averted. A Russian soldier joined us. He spoke a little Ukrainian and some German so he could converse with us. He told us that he was a medical doctor. He was very handsome with dark hair and eyes and we were sure that he was Jewish and he wanted us to believe that he was a Jew. When he left another young soldier came and this one was in fact Jewish, though he looked like a typical Russian. He was light skinned with blue eyes and blond hair. He spoke to us in Yiddish. He told us not to tell anybody, which house we would sleep in overnight. The houses were empty and we could sleep in almost any one. He warned us not to trust the medical doctor who was not Jewish, but Armenian. He opened our eyes about the dangers of being raped. It was a war and hard to control the soldiers. He left and promised to come to us in the evening

and we told him which house we would stay overnight. We had gone inside an empty house where we intended to stay and rest before starting our journey to another town or city under Russian sovereignty.

The Jewish soldier kept his word and in the evening, he came to us. He brought us food, which was his supper. He talked with us. When he left we girls went to sleep in the attic and my brothers took away the ladder. This was a precaution in case some soldier, seeing light, might come into the house. We lied down on the straw and we fell asleep immediately, but in the middle of the night, knocking at the front door awakened us. When we heard the knocking, we froze in fear and instinctively covered ourselves with straw. My brother opened the door. On the step, stood a young soldier who asked for a drink of water. My brother gave him water and when he finished drinking, he left. After his departure we felt relieved.

The rest of the night passed without any disturbance. Early in the morning, the young Jewish soldier came to us. He turned out to be a security man in the army. His name was Shapiro. He took my brother Leo outside and had a very serious conversation with him. He asked him a lot of questions concerning our origin, our past, our upbringing and how we survived the war. He was listening and my brother gave him straight and correct answers. He liked what he heard. For security reasons, he had to check out whoever stayed around his military units. This was war and one could not trust strangers. This was his responsibility in order to guard against espionage or sabotage. He said to my brother that for our own good, he should leave this place as soon as possible. First of all, one could be accused of being spies even if they were innocent people. There was also the danger of being killed or in the best-case scenario, to be sent to some labor camp in Russia. Secondly, the war was still going on and in war, one could not always know what might happen and what turn it might take. The Germans could push the Russians back and return. This was not a warning, but more an order. Though we were extremely tired, we had to leave

this place. He gave us some money and a loaf of bread. We were sure that this was his daily ration. We had no choice, but to start our journey into the unknown. Again, we dragged our legs and were barefoot because we had lost our shoes while running during the bombardment. Every step on the pebbles hurt our feet, which were cut by the sharp edges of the stones. The day was very hot and the sun burned our faces. We were thirsty and my mouth was dried up. We walked on the roads as we passed some villages.

We saw a great destruction everywhere. We saw burned houses, trees and burned grains in the field. We did not meet any peasants walking on the roads. From time to time we heard explosions or sporadic artillery fire. Every time we heard an explosion, we trembled. It seemed to us that this was so close to us that we would be hit by a bomb. With each passing minute, our thirst was more and more hard to endure. It was almost unbearable. My mouth was dry and burning without any saliva. When we passed a house where peasants were inside, my sister Anna took the courage and knocked at the door and when someone came out, she begged for water and piece of bread. Sometimes a good-hearted person would give her some water and a piece of bread, but many times they refused to give her anything.

Water was more important than food for us. We walked and walked and had not the slightest idea where we were and did not know where we were going. When we spotted a stream we washed our faces and drank the water from the stream. After some hours of walking, we came to a place where the shelling started to be heavy and bombs were falling some distance ahead of us. This fact indicated that we came closer to the front. We became so apathetic and oblivious to everything that was going around that even falling bombs did not arouse fear in us. We were totally passive and our minds stopped thinking. As robots, we walked forward and forward. The little stones and pebbles, which covered the roads, were hurting our feet, but it was impossible to avoid stepping on them. From our impassiveness, we were suddenly awakened by a noise of a military

vehicle driven by a Russian soldier. The soldier was shouting from a far so we stopped and the car approached us. The door was opened and one young Russian soldier asked us where were we going and offered to take us with them.

His invitation startled us and seemed suspicious. Our explanation of the motives that stimulated the offer of the young Russian soldier to drive us was a mere fantasy. We had suspected that this soldier must be an undercover military agent and that the young security officer, who interviewed my brother and asked us to leave, gave him an order to catch us and bring us back. He could have thought that he had made a mistake and that we could really be spies because we spoke German with the Armenian doctor. Of course, our reasoning was ridiculous.

We could not reject his invitation to an offer to drive us. The temptation was greater than our imaginary suspicion. We got into the car. There were several Russian soldiers. They were young, very handsome and in a good mood. The stress of war was not shown on their faces. Maybe they were recruited to serve in the military not long ago and did not take part in any fighting or perhaps their job was only security. The soldiers were very cordial and they knew some Ukrainian and conversed with us. It was obvious that we were completely wrong in our distrust.

They gave us two loaves of bread and a bottle of water. This was a precious gift because we were hungry and thirsty. We did not have anything to drink or to eat for a while. We drank the water and we felt refreshed. The bread we saved for later and in small portions so that it would last longer. It was splendid to drive in a vehicle and not to have to step on stones and pebbles. After a long drive with them, we had to leave the vehicle because they went in a different direction. We asked them for a direction to a nearby town before they left. They explained to my brothers how to reach the town and they had maps. We thanked them very much for their kindness and help before departing. Now our destination was to reach a town. Before, we walked

aimlessly in not knowing where we were and where we where going, but now we knew the directions to a town where there were no German soldiers anymore.

Now our goal was to find the town. We had a good rest in the vehicle and we had food to eat. We sat down on side of a road and ate a piece of bread and again we drank the water that was warm. Our batteries were recharged and feeling energized, we again started on our journey. We began to walk a little faster, but after a short time, our energy diminished and once again our steps were slower and slower. It was a wonder that we could endure so much. Being so young was a help to us. Finally, almost at the end of our endurance, our legs almost refused to walk anymore when we reached a town. We read the sign: Kolbuszow.

CHAPTER 35

We were so glad to be in a town. It was late evening, but still there was light. We walked narrow streets. There were small wooden houses painted white and other colors. Some of the houses showed the signs of war. There were some people strolling along at a leisurely pace. They looked at us with curiosity. We formed a very strange group because our faces, blushed from the heat, covered the unusual paleness of the skin of our faces that was not exposed to light or beams of the sun for twp years. We were looking wild and barefoot with ragged clothes. We did not expect sympathy even though we were a picture of misery and pity. We did not care. It was no doubt that they recognized us as being Jews who came out of hiding. We felt some hostility towards us. They made some nasty remarks. We did not react to this. We were not afraid anymore of being denounced us to the Germans. There were no more Germans. There were friendly Russians who came to liberate Poland from the German tyranny. How comforting was the realization of this fact? We were free. They wondered how there could have been some Jews still alive. We did not give a damn if they were disappointed. We did not react to these unfavorable remarks and walked

undisturbed. Our thoughts were concentrated on one thing: where could we find lodging? We did not have the slightest idea how to find a place to sleep. We looked around and we were observing our surroundings. After a while of walking and searching, we noticed an empty, wrecked house with broken glass in the windows and the paint was pealed off. Jews who were taken away had probably occupied this abandoned house before. Why nobody occupied this house and fixed it was hard to guess, but this was not our problem.

We were glad to find an empty house where we could stay for a while and rest. We were weary and every bone in our bodies was sore and hurting us. Our legs were hurting us most of all. They were bruised from walking barefoot on stones and pebbles. Our faces were inflamed and burning from exposure to the sun. My sister's face was very swollen due to a bad reaction to the sun and her eyes could hardly been seen. The first thing what we did was sit down and catch our breath. We did not even have the strength to talk.

When we rested, we looked around. We were pleased with what we found. Inside the apartment, we found some treasures namely a knife, spoons, a plate and some broken pots and pans. There was a stove that was still in a usable state. There stood a broken table and chairs. We found ourselves in a luxurious dwelling or so it seemed to us. You have to consider that it was the first time after two years of not experiencing the pleasure of sitting on a chair. We sat on a chair. For the first time we could cook our own meal because we had a stove and kitchen utensils that were still usable despite being a little rusted and broken. There was one problem. We did not have anything to cook. We brought water from the well and my brother made fire by rubbing two stones together like the way primitive people did. He found some wood, which we used to make fire in the stove.

My brother went to the fields nearby and brought back some straw, which we spread on the floor to prepare a convenient place to sleep. It was much better to sleep on the straw than naked ground. Everything was arranged in order. Now

the problem remained of where to get food, but my brothers solved this problem promptly and without any hesitation. To survive and not to die from starvation, one had to lower his principles and break one of the Ten Commandments, specifically the one stating, "thou shall not steal." Had we any other choice? Could we ask some Polish people for help after witnessing their unfriendliness? Would not it be a shame to die at the end of the war from starvation? We hoped that G-d would forgive us for aberration from our moral standards. Late in the night when the town was asleep and the farmers were in deep sleep, my brothers ventured into the fields and managed to dig out some vegetables such as carrots, potatoes and to pick cabbage, cucumbers and corn. They took only a very small quantity and from different farmers so that the farmers would not notice that someone was stealing vegetables from their farm.

My brothers' nightly escapades were successful. They came back unnoticed by anybody and loaded with vegetables in their hands, pockets, shirts and every place possible providing us with food for a couple of days. My sisters boiled the potatoes and cooked cabbage, corn and carrots and we had a feast after several days of diet on pieces of bread and water. We drank boiled water. We had a restful night and fell asleep right away. We were so tired and exhausted from the tension, anxieties and hardships that we experienced in the last several days. In the morning, when I opened my eyes, at first I did not know where I was, but momentarily I realized with great pleasure that we were free and had a place to stay and sleep.

We stayed inside the house all of the time resting and, for the first time for a long time, we washed ourselves with warm water. We used sand to scrap the dirt from our hands because we did not have any soap. Refreshed, we felt much better. After two days or more, some Jews came out from different hiding places and appeared in our house to join us. We were pleased to have company. Someone had told them that some Jews were in this house. The next couple of days, others arrived. There was a grandfather with a grandchild and two sons. The

grandchild was a little kid and the two sons were young men. There was a married couple and there were several young unmarried men. Every one had had a different story to tell about how they miraculously survived. We talked and talked and shared our experiences.

Rumors started to spread in the town about the Jews who had come out from their hiding places, which were described as holes. Again, they were surprised that some Jews were still alive. There was no sympathy towards us whatsoever in this little town. These rumors of Jews in this little, broken house reached the Jewish soldiers in the Russian army. How happy they were to see some surviving Jews. When they visited us they kissed us and showed their affection and concern. They brought us bread and their portions of food. They were astonished upon hearing our stories and these soldiers, hardened in the war to whom death was not a stranger and who saw so many people killed in fighting, had tears in their eyes hearing about the fate of Jews and their tortures.

This time, even we did not have much to do in the time was going fast. We had company and we were free people, but we did not explore the city. We stayed home. One day I got sick with high fever. My face got swollen on both sides. We did not know what kind of sickness this was. There was, in the town, a military doctor so I went to be examined. When I came, I found out that the doctor was a young Russian woman who took care of the sick Russian soldiers. After checking my face, she said that I have mumps. How I got this sickness I did not know. I was not in contact with any sick children since this was a contagious illness. She was very polite and gave me some cotton to wrap my face with, but did not have any medication to give me. They were short of everything; they did not have even aspirin. I came home not relieved from my discomfort, but at least I knew what kind of sickness I had. I wrapped my face with additional rags to keep warm and I drank hot water to keep my fever down.

Several days I suffered not having any drugs to ease my pain or to lower my high temperature. I rested all day on the straw and nature took its course.

The worst was that I could not sleep during the night because it bothered me the most during the night. After several days, I got better without taking any drugs. It took several days more until I completely recovered.

The days went eventless and helped us regain some strength. We did not know when we would leave this town, but some event unexpectedly took place, which could have had a tragic outcome. This event prompted us to leave this place and look for another town. A Jewish soldier who was told about the Jews who survived came to pay us a visit. He was a young and handsome man in his thirties, married with one child. He told us about his family and his worries about them in not knowing what had happened to them. He lived in Romania. He left his wife and child to serve in the Russian army. We told him about our past and our life in hiding. We talked and talked and did not realize that it was very late. Since his job was to deliver oil to the front, he had to get up very early in the morning. It was very late after midnight so he decided to stay in our house overnight because it did not pay for him to go back to his military quarters.

He said to us that he would like to sleep in our apartment overnight and early morning go straight to deliver oil to the front. We put some straw on the floor and he rested and covered himself with a military coat. We all went to sleep. In the early morning, we were awakened by a terrible noise and shouting. Perplexed, we wondered what happened. We heard strong knocking and pounding at the door and hostile voices cursing and yelling: "You dirty Jews! From which hole did you crawl out? We are going to kill all of you." They started to break the door. The Jewish soldier opened the door. Standing at the door was the Polish police. They did not expect to see a Russian soldier who would spoil their fun game with Jews. Upon seeing a Russian soldier, they became bewildered and momentarily changed their behavior. The Jewish soldier started to yell at them: "You sons of a bitch! What do you want? Why did you come to disturb peoples' sleep?" They became as mild as sheep and started to apologize and said

that they came to take the men to dig some ditches. When they knocked at the door, my brothers managed to hide themselves in the cellar, which was in the kitchen. We managed to cover the top of the cellar with straw and sat on it. Houses in small towns used to have cellars in the kitchen. The policemen took several young men and disregarded that they were weak for being so long in hiding places. They returned in the evening tired from a day's work. Taking the young men to work was a pretext of what was bound for us. They wanted to cover the real purpose of coming to our house. Why were they cursing us and threatening that they were going to kill us? If not for the presence of the Jewish soldier, they would have raped and killed us. Nobody would know about this. Maybe my brothers hidden in the cellar would survive, but even this was not a definite because they knew that there was a cellar in the kitchen. Also, the straw that covered the top of the cellar did not conceal the entrance.

The truth was that this Jewish soldier saved our life. Merely by lucky circumstances, we survived this time. Was this a late coincidence when he suddenly decided to stay overnight in our place or was this our good luck and destiny to survive again? This event could have caused the end of our lives at the end of the war after all of our struggling. Again, a good angel had watched over us.

CHAPTER 36

After this occurrence, we were afraid to remain in this hostile town. This experience told us that it was not safe to stay here. Though we would have liked to stay a little longer in this house and to regain our strength before walking again to another town, we could not afford to take a chance to remain. We could not be sure if the policemen would come again, but if they happened to come, there would no longer be a Jewish soldier to protect us.

Reluctantly, we left the house as well as the rest of the survivors. We departed from them and said goodbye to them. We started again our journey into

the unknown because we did not know where we would wind up. Our aim was to reach another town. We dragged our legs again while walking the main roads so as not to get lost. Also, in this time, we did not meet anyone on the roads. We were very careful not to step on broken glass or stones with which the roads were covered, but one could not avoid accidentally stepping on a stone or even glass. We had blisters and some cuts on our feet and this was painful, but we disregarded it and continued to walk. The scene was the same as before with some houses burnt and the grain in the fields was ruined. This time, we had something to eat and we had a bottle with water, which we took with us when leaving Kolbuszow. Also, in this time we heard the noise of falling bombs. It was frightening because we could have been in a sphere of bombardment.

After many hours of burdensome, walking we reached a town. We read the sign: Mielec. We walked through the town, which was larger than Kolbuszow. It was more populated nicer houses. Here, the scenario was repeated once more. Polish people were again looking at us with curiosity. It was no wonder because we looked strange. Upon looking at us, it was still easy to figure out that we were Jews who came out from a hiding place. However, the people were more sympathetic than in Kolbuszow. They seemed less hostile and one could even see in the expression of their faces that they pitied us when looking at our miserable figures. One man even offered us information concerning the owner of a mill in this town who had survived the circumstances and returned to his home. He gave us his address and told us which direction to go to find his house. We thanked him for his information.

We found the place where the owner of the mill lived. We talked to him, he was glad to see surviving Jews, but he could not help us too much because he just returned and he did not have anything besides his house. He gave me shoes, which was very important for me. Walking without shoes was very inconvenient. However, one very good thing happened by our coming to this place. In the vicinity of this house, a barracks stood in the garden, which consisted of one

room. A young Polish couple occupied those barracks. It happened that this couple was moving out to the countryside for a period of time. They took pity on us and offered their small apartment for the time of their absence. How lucky we were to have a place to stay. We were so thankful for their kindness and compassion. After the bad experiences in Kolbuszow, it was so heart warming to see some sympathy towards us.

This room was furnished. There was a bed, table, chairs, a stove and kitchen utilities, pots and pans, knife, spoons and plates. They left everything that was essential for daily living. We had everything. We had a stove to cook with, but were lacking the products needed for cooking. However, we had hot boiled water to drink. Some Polish neighbors gave us some food. One day, a young boy came to us. He knew us from Debica. My brother met him in the street. He was surprised upon seeing my brother and came to us right away. He had survived by staying in a forest with some other Jews. He also went through a rough time and, one can say, miraculously stayed alive. He helped us a little.

We could wash ourselves with hot water and we found a piece of soap. We took off our clothes and washed them and dried in the sun. While the clothes were drying out, we were naked inside the room and were covered with a blanket, which the owners left. It was a hot day and the clothes dried out very fast. How pleasant it was to put on clean clothes. I felt like I was a princess. The clothes smelled so good.

One evening, my brother Leo got sick. He had a bad case of diarrhea. While going to the lavatory, which was located in the garden, he fainted. Someone noticed him lying unconscious on the ground. It was very scary because there was no doctor. After a while, he came back to senses. We did not have any medication to give him for his diarrhea and he was bleeding. We did not have any light food to give him to eat. A Polish neighbor felt sorry for him and for several days, until he got better, was bringing him food. He recovered thanks to this good-hearted woman.

Luck continued to stay with us. One day, a Russian Jewish soldier whose division was stationed in Mielec, came to us. This division was not too far from our apartment. He was the manager of a magazine, which provided food products for the army. He was born in Russia, but he knew a little Yiddish language so he could converse with us. He was so happy to meet Jewish survivors and we were happy to meet him. He provided us with provisions, which lasted for a long time. He gave us flour, sugar, various grains and salt for example. Now we had food to cook and to eat. He saved us from starving. He was so good to us. He gave me his military coat. He listened to our stories with great interest. He was young as were most of the Jewish soldiers whom we met. He did not know where his family was during the war. They were evacuated from the town where they lived when the German army was approaching Leningrad. We were sad when he left Mielec with his division. We thanked him from the bottom of our hearts for his compassion and generosity.

We met some Jewish survivors. One of them was a young girl who was saved by an old, illiterate peasant. She decided to stay with him. She could not leave him because he saved her life and she felt a moral obligation to remain with him. She had helped us by giving us milk every day. When looking at her face, one could see that she was not happy. How could she be? She had lost her whole family? We also got acquainted with two Jewish women. One was very young and the other was middle aged. A Polish couple had hid them. The sad story was that the man had abused them both by forcing them to have sexual relations. He took advantage of their dependence on him and they could not tell his wife because he warned them that the consequences would be harmful to them. So they had no choice and accepted his advances in submission.

Every one whom we met had different stories to tell about how they but survived, but there was one thing that they had in common. Many times they were in critical situations and the smallest wrong move could have turned into a disaster. Many people tried to escape and hide, but they did not succeed. The chances for survival were diminished by the hostility of the population.

Nobody would ever know for sure how many Jews who tried to hide, perished and in what circumstances they died. Nobody would never know their suffering or witness the fear in their eyes at the last moment of their life. Nobody would know who killed them or who denounced them to the German authorities. Those responsible for such heinous, criminal acts would never be punished.

Not far from us was a Russian military command headquarters. It was Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish religion. A group of Jewish soldiers came to visit us. They asked us for permission to pray in our room. We gladly agreed but we did not have a prayer book for them. They also asked us not mention to their commander that they prayed. We promised not to say anything about this to their commander who was a major or an even higher rank. He would also come and talk to us. He was a very friendly man. However, the Jewish soldiers were afraid that they would have some problems if he knew that they

were observing the Jewish holiday because in Russia, religion was outlawed and practicing religion was punishable. They did not trust the Major. They knew that he was an atheist and that he was blindly following the Russian code of law. To be on the safe side, they locked themselves in the room and to our surprise, one of the young soldiers knew the prayers by heart. It was a mystery as to how and when this young man learned such prayers by heart. What kind of memory did he have to remember every word? This was amazing that a young man in a communist country was interested enough to learn Jewish tradition and it was puzzling how he got prayer books. The other soldiers were listening with devotion to his recitation of the Hebrew prayers. Of course, we did not mention their observance of Yom Kippur to the major.

The major was a very interesting character and a little mysterious. We did not know for sure what nationality he was. We suspected that he was Jewish, but he did not offer any clue of such while conversing, but there were some signs that supported our suggestion. Could his concern, interest and emotional reaction towards us as surviving Jews be considered an indicator? When he left Mielec, he gave us all his clothes and even his shirt, which he was wearing. When we did not want to accept it, he got angry and said in that case he would give it to the Poles. Hearing this we took his gift and thanked him warmly. We were moved by his generosity. This was a great help to us because my sister sold his clothes and we had some money that came in very handy later.

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CHAPTER 37

It was late fall in the year of 1944. The war was approaching to its successful conclusion for the allied forces, but severe fighting was still going on. The Germans were retreating on all fronts and more and more places were liberated. The Germans were still bombing cities and inflicting great destruction and many casualties. During one night, the bombardment of Mielec was severe. Loud explosions followed one after another. The sky was red from

fire. Our barrack was shaking from the detonations. It was like an earthquake. The bombs were falling very close to our place. It was too dangerous to remain inside the apartment. There was a house, which stood not far from us and was a brick building, which had several floors and had a shelter. In a hurry, we ran out from our apartment. The bombs were falling and we were lucky not to be hit by them. Out of breathe and frightened, we reached the shelter. Inside, there were tenants from this building as well as from others. Nobody made any remarks upon seeing us. Everyone was sitting quietly and trembling with fear while praying to God not be hit by falling bombs. This was a terrible night. All night bombs were falling. We did not know how this would end. If a bomb were to destroy this building, we could all be buried underneath the rubble and die. Every time a bomb was falling, an explosion followed and panic gripped me.

In the morning, the bombing stopped and there was a lull from the fighting. We left the shelter and went back to our apartment. We were pale from the night's frightening experience and our eyelids were swollen from sleepless nights. We were sleepy, but we could not fall asleep. We were too nervous and anxious.

The result of the nightly bombardment was horrible. A number of people were killed and many were injured. Some houses were destroyed. What saddened us the most was the news of this young girl, who had survived the war by being hidden by an old peasant, was killed during the bombardment. We did not want to be exposed to new bombardment. Here we met sympathy from the Polish neighbors and we felt safe with them, but we knew that we had to leave this place as soon as possible. This was not so much because of the danger of being killed by hostile police, as it was case in Kolbuszow, but because of the danger of being killed by the bombs. We heard that Rzeszow was a safer place because there was no bombardment. However, it was not a simple process of getting there. It was too far away and we could not walk. There was also an additional reason to go

to Rzeszow. Rzeszow was a larger town and we expected to find more surviving Jews.

My brother Leo made a decision that he would try to go to see for himself the conditions in Rzeszow. The next day, he left and we were waiting for a message from him. How my brother managed to reach Rzeszow was a mystery when considering the question of how he knew the directions to the town and which roads to take. However, at that time we were not focusing on that. At this time, the most important fact was that he had arrived in one piece. Even more astonishing was when we learned that he had found an empty apartment, partially destroyed by bombs on the main street of Rzeszow, 3 Maja. However, some rooms remained undamaged and could be used to live in.

After achieving this, my brother came back to us to help prepare for our leaving to Rzeszow. This was not an easy task to carry out. We had to have some kind transportation. There were no trains or cars and the only kind of transportation that was left was a wagon driven by horses. We found some obstacles when we could not find any coachman willing to drive us during this dangerous time to Rzeszow. The roads were bad and the bombs were falling. We almost gave up on this idea until the last minute when we found a man who agreed to drive us to Rzeszow. Of course, we paid him with the money, which we saved from selling the clothes of the Russian Major. The money came in handy and we were on the move again. We said goodbye to our neighbors and thanked them for their kindness. We could not thank the young couple that temporarily gave us their room because they were still away.

The journey to Rzeszow was a rough one. The bombs were still falling and every sound of an explosion froze the blood in our veins. We traveled along roads, which were full of holes, bump, and our wagon was shaking all the while. We were bouncing up and down in our seats. We traveled through forest and our driver thought that this would be safer, but the explosions did not stop. The

sound of them was deafening to our ears because the bombs were falling in such close vicinity.

We saw a picture of destruction wherever we traveled. There were burnt houses and burnt, overturned trees that were blackened from the fire. To travel in this kind of condition was a hellish experience. Our driver was mad. He was upset that he agreed to drive us. We were worried that he might become discouraged to the point of turning back to Mielec. We offered to pay him a little more when we arrived in Rzeszow. After some time of driving, with every mile farther from Mielec and closer to Rzeszow, the intensity of bombardment was diminishing and finally stopped completely.

Our good fortune did not abandon us, whole and unhurt we arrived in Rzeszow. Many, many times we could be killed by falling bombs, merely by mere luck we came out from this journey unharmed. And again a good angel watched over us all the way along and brought us safe to Rzeszow. We paid our coachman and wished him a safe return home.

CHAPTER 38

Once in Rzeszow, we started a new page in our wandering after leaving the hiding place. Rzeszow was a bigger town in comparison to the two other towns where we were before, namely Kolbuszow and Mielec. Our apartment was on the main street of the town. On the main street, there were many stores with all kinds of merchandise. A lot of people were walking on the street. The city was quiet and there was no noise of falling bombs. Nobody looked at us when we went to our apartment. The apartment was empty. It was most likely occupied by Germans who fled and took everything with them. There were no beds and the undamaged rooms were completely empty except in the kitchen, which had a table, chairs, stove and kitchen utilities. We did not have many things to unpack. My brothers brought straw, which we spread on the floor in one of the rooms. Once it was a beautiful, large apartment with many rooms. However, now some of the

rooms were completely damaged from bombing. The walls were broken and the glass in the windows was missing. It was even dangerous to be inside these rooms, but there were enough rooms in good condition to live in.

We were so fortunate to have an apartment, a place where to sleep and where to cook. Our conditions of life improved alot. It was the first night that we could sleep undisturbed a whole night. Sounds of explosion did not wake us up. We felt very comfortable sleeping on the straw on the floor. We were not hungry anymore. It was the first time after two years that I ate a piece of cake and we had meat to eat. There was a big market place where people bought and sold all kind of merchandise. One could get cans of meat sold by Russian soldiers, dairy products, fruits and vegetables that were sold by peasants, as well as bread, cakes and clothes. A variety of merchandise was spread on stands. The market was crowded and noisy. One wanted to outcry the other. The sellers advertised their products in loud voices.

The atmosphere in the market had an exciting flavor to me. Noise meant life and activity. I was yearning, while in the hiding place, for the sounds and voices of human beings. Stillness, I mean a complete stillness, is a sign of death. There does not exist a complete stillness in nature.

In the market, one could see a lot of Russian soldiers selling and buying. This market was the source of our income that provided us with food. My sister got a small amount of money and I can hardly remember how she got it. It could have possibly been left after Russian major's clothes were sold. With this small amount of money, she would buy something and later sell it for profit. My brother Leo and my sister Anna used to go to the market every day and became dealers. They made enough money to provide the family with enough money to buy food and some old clothes such as shoes and old dresses for us girls and pants and shirts for my brothers. It was the first time, after more than two years, that we had an unlimited amount of food.

My sister was selling the Russian soldiers' whisky or cigarettes in exchange for cans of meat. The Russian soldiers were practically crazy about whisky and would sell everything to get a hold of a bottle of whisky. They were so addicted to alcohol that in case they could not get it, they would even drink cologne. The scent of cologne did not bother them. I remember when being in a hiding place, we wondered if there would come a time when we could eat bread as much as we wanted. We got stronger upon being more nourished. My brother's hair on his face grew back and our pale faces got a healthier coloring.

The days were passing with a faster pace and were not so monotonous. I was no longer bored. What did I do all day? I did not do anything special. I merely walking the streets gave me great pleasure. I never grew tired of walking long hours. I was walking at a leisurely pace, observing and wondering as a small child happy at discovering new things. I liked to walk along the busy streets so full of activity. People were walking, some very fast and some more slowly. There were stores with appealing merchandise. There were cookies, cakes and chocolate among other delicacies displayed inside the store windows. There was not the slightest sign that a war was still going on even though the city of Krakow for example, where we lived before the war, was not free. It was still under the German occupation.

I enjoyed looking at the window displays even I could not afford to buy anything. It was such a good feeling to walk free along the streets and not to be afraid of the passing Poles, not to be frightened when they looked at me. I was no longer scared that someone would denounce me or kill me. There were police; there was Russian authority. The Russians were seen all over the streets.

The most precious thing that I gained by being free was that I could talk loud, scream, laugh and sing. I did not have to sit quietly in one place. I could walk and we could run. People usually take for granted all of these

activities, which are part of their daily living. My family and I were deprived of all of these activities for two years.

Sometimes, I had an urge to scream out loud that I was free. Only a person who has experienced a similar situation could understand our feeling of happiness to be free again. While being in Kolbuszow and Mielec, we had many problems, which prevented me from enjoying fully all of the pleasures that come with being a free person. Almost all the time, I was staying inside the room to avoid meeting people. There was a perennial fear in Kolbuszow; there was heavy bombardment in Mielec, but now no eminent danger was threatening. I had food to eat, a place to sleep and was not afraid that someone would knock at the door cursing us and wanting to cause harm. I could walk in the street and not hear hostile remarks. I could wash myself every day with hot water and soap. I fully realized what a blessing it was to have freedom and not to have to hide.

One could imagine my satisfaction when I went to a dressmaker who sewed me a suit from the military coat, which I got as a present from a Jewish soldier in Mielec. The fabric was coarse and heavy, but I thought that this suit was the most elegant outfit. The weather started to become a little cooler and this outfit was very practical.

In Rzeszow, we had no personal contacts with Poles except with the young woman who lived next door to our apartment. I used to visit her and talk to her. I was longing to have some company and to talk someone. She was very pretty, but simple and ignorant. She did not know the most basic facts of life, but she was a good and warm person and I liked her. She made a proposition too tempting to reject. She wanted to know if I could sleep in her apartment. She had a separate bed for me in her room. Some Russian soldiers were staying in her apartment and she was afraid to sleep by herself. I was so delighted to be able to sleep in a bed, which was comfortable, so soft and where I could have clean nice blankets to cover myself. After sleeping for such a long time on the

ground that was covered with straw and hay, it felt so good and I felt like a princess while sleeping in such a nice bed.

The Russian soldiers used to lodge in private houses. Sometimes, the soldiers would stay on for one or two nights and maybe even longer depending upon their mission. The town was a transit point for soldiers. The Russian Commander used to assign them private houses where they could stay. They stayed in our damaged apartment as well.

One day, a group of young Russian soldiers arrived. They did not mind at all that in our apartment, there were no beds and that they had to sleep on the floor. They stayed for several days. After their departure, another group of soldiers came. It started to get lively in our apartment. One could hear their laughter as they cooked, fried meat and drank whisky in great quantities. They started the meal with vodka and they finished the meal with vodka. The amazing part was that they were never drunk, but only merry. They laughed a lot and they sang and joked. They behaved correctly in our house and they were respectful. The young soldiers were friendly, even inviting us to dine with them. They did not take no for an answer. They used to bring a lot of food and we shared meals with them. Of course, they saw that we were poor and evidently felt sorry for us.

I picked up a lot of Russian words and was even able to converse with them. Though they had respect for us girls, we did not trust them without reservation. They were soldiers with guns and this was still wartime so when my sisters went to sleep at night, they locked the door to their room even though the soldiers never tried to get into their room or tried to abuse them sexually. They behaved as gentlemen and showed good manners. This was not a front where there were no women. In this town it was easy to have a woman. There were a lot of young women who would do anything for money. There were prostitutes as well.

The young Russian soldiers had many stories to tell. We met very interesting characters. They told us about their heroic deeds. They told us macabre stories. How truthful their stories were, one could not know, but they were exciting and fascinating. It was obvious that they wanted to impress us by showing how brave they were, but it did not matter to me if the stories were true or false. I had fun listening. It really did not make any difference to me if they exaggerated a little. Of course, I pretended that I believed, without any reservation, in the credibility of their stories. I liked to listen to their sentimental Russian songs full of melancholy, longing and love.

Once, there came a group of soldiers who were of a special breed. They took out a great amount of Polish and Russian money from their pockets and started to tear up the money. We ask the leader of this group why were they doing it. He explained that they were attempting to find out which money was stronger and which was easier to tear up. This would be how they would prove what money had a greater value. They were foolish and they simply played. Their behavior aroused in us some suspicion and we wondered how they got so much money. Were they deserters who were robbing people in the streets? They behaved properly in our place. They were very friendly to us. Their leader was especially friendly. He was very handsome. He was tall, slim and blond with dark blue eyes. It was a pleasure to look at his angelic face. He told us that his mother was Jewish and he considered himself Jewish. He gave us a lot of food. His name was Lenka. Looking at his innocent, young face I could not imagine that he would rob somebody.

While walking in the streets, my brother Leo met a friend of our family who lived in Krakow. My brother brought him to our apartment and because he just came out from hiding, he had no place to stay so we proposed to him to stay with us. There was enough room for more people. From time to time different surviving Jews used to come to our apartment to sleep overnight. This family friend survived in the forest. He was worrying about his wife and little son

with whom he got separated and lost trace of. He did not know if they were alive. He stayed with us.

Life in Rzeszow seemed heavenly to us compared to our life in hiding and later in Kolbuszow and Mielec even though my family slept on straw on the floor and that there was no electricity in our apartment. We would light a kerosene lamp. In the evening, I liked to draw the faces of the Russian soldiers. I did not have any books to read and I did not miss them. Evenings in our apartment were lively and never boring. Soldiers were singing; survivors were visiting us and sharing with us their nerve-racking experiences. There was a lot of discussion concerning the war and the advances of the Allies with the defeat of the German army, which once was considered at the time, a mighty and indestructible military power. Every day, there was news, which was spreading as if it were carried on the wings of the birds. People were waiting for the end of the war.

Even in this tranquil time when it seemed as if everything was going well for us, we were not spared from a scary event. Usually, there were soldiers in our apartment in the evening, but this time my family was the only ones home. We were sitting at the table in the kitchen. In this room, there was a table and chairs. The other rooms were empty and only straw was spread on the floors. The door was not locked because we never locked the door, even when we were leaving the apartment. There was nothing worthy enough to be stolen. The door was open and a Russian soldier came in. It was nothing unusual because we were used to seeing soldiers come to sleep over night, but this time it was a different case. The soldier pointed the gun at my brother Sam and said to him, "come with me." We were stunned and could not figure out why he was taking him away and why he chose him over other members of our family.

He had a gun and my brother had to obey his order. After they left, we were frightened about what could possibly happen to him. Hastily, we were thinking about what to do and where to go for help: to the Russian Military

Headquarters or to the police. One had to remember that the war was still going on and it was not permitted for private people to walk at nighttime. There was a curfew and all of the windows had to be covered with black paper or heavy curtain so as not to allow the light to be seen. Our hands were bound and we were helpless.

Next to our apartment, on the same floor, a high-ranking Russian military officer lived with a Polish girl. He looked Jewish, but we were not sure about his nationality. Usually, Jewish soldiers took some interest in meeting surviving Jews, but he was different. He did not pay us any attention. I took courage, went to him and told him about what happened. I cried, kissed his hands and begged him to save my brother. At first, he did not want to help me. He did not want to interfere. He was not at all moved at seeing my despair. Besides, there was a party going on. They were dancing, drinking and enjoyed themselves. Maybe he did not want to be disturbed.

I was desperate and in such a state of hopelessness that I could hardly control my conduct. I did something unreasonable. I totally forgot that there was curfew and one could even be shot for being outside. I ran outside the house to see where the Russian soldier was taking my brother. There was complete darkness. The streets were deserted; not one living soul was outside. I was standing and trembling while being helpless and not knowing what to do. I soon heard steps behind me. I turned my head and there was the Russian military officer approaching. I did not expect him to come. Had he changed his mind and was now willing to help us? He was angry with me and started to yell at me. He ordered me to go home right away. He told me that I am completely out of my mind to go out. He reminded me that there was a curfew in effect and that one could be shot on the spot. He assured me that he was going to look for my brother Sam and that he was going to see what had happened to him. I was overjoyed upon hearing his promise. I went home as the soldier went to look for Sam.

I came home, but my family did not even know that I ran out from the house after he refused to help us. They thought that I was still talking to the Russian officer. We waited impatiently for the return of the officer and to hear if he had found my brother. After a period of nerve breaking waiting the officer came with good news. He spotted my brother walking with the Russian soldier who was presumably drunk. He stopped the soldier and asked him where he was taking my brother. We did not know what type of explanation he gave, but he had taken my brother to jail. The officer walked them to the jail to be sure that the soldier did not kill him. Once my brother was put in jail, the officer had left.

In the morning, my brother was released from jail and he came home. If not for the help of the Russian officer, the soldier who was drunk would have probably not taken him to jail. He could have killed him presumably for no reason. It was impossible to determine for sure if he had originally planned to come to our house. Perhaps he came because the door was open where he accidentally walked in and he took my brother Sam because he did not like his looks. This was our only guess. It was of no use trying to find a logical explanation for his behavior. What was important was that my brother was alive and we were all together again. Once again, a dangerous situation in the chain of many others, turned out to have a happy ending.

CHAPTER 39

After this frightening event, our lives returned to normalcy. There were no more bad experiences while staying in Rzeszow. Life was passing uneventfully and we felt secure. Our attention was completely concentrated in following the news about the war. Though it was the last convulsions of the war, as long a war was going on, some unpredicted complications could potentially occur. Krakow was not yet liberated. We waited impatiently for the happy conclusion of the fighting and prayed to God that peace would come soon. Not only did we wait for the end of the war, which was on everyone's mind; we were now no longer outcasts, but a part of the city's population. Even though we lived in worse conditions than others did, we were free and could freely move without being afraid that others may have us denounced or even killed.

My family was very busy in finding ways to provide us with food and the basic necessities of life. I was not involved in this matter so I had plenty of time on my hands. I continued to walk the streets and observe the passing people. I would also like to watch the store window show where different merchandise was displayed. How delicious was the cookie or ice cream, which I bought. After two years of being confined to a quiet and dim place, where I would sit almost motionlessly all day while being allowed only to speak at a whisper, the bright light and the city noise with its pulsing of activities made me feel good and alive. However, the overwhelming feeling of happiness when we, for the first time, went out from the hiding place and became once again free people lost some degree of intensity.

After a period of time, I got used to being free and started to yearn for more. Just the fact of being able to move freely and to talk loud and to eat as much I had a desire for was no longer enough for me. I felt that something is missing in my life and I started to have more expectations from life. I was dreaming of having a complete and normal life. I wanted to be able to return to my home, namely Krakow. I wanted to be able to go to school and to have

friends. I was thinking a lot about Krakow and how happy I would be if I could return there.

We were waiting for the day when Krakow would be liberated. One day our wishes were fulfilled. The good news came of the Germans were driven out from Krakow. We were overjoyed and decided to return to Krakow as soon as possible. However, this was not simple and easy to carry out. The war was still going on and the roads were not save because there were bombs and mines all around, but my family, in being so anxious to return to Krakow, decided to take a chance and disregard all of the warnings about the danger that was involved in this trip. There were no trains or any other means of public transportation. Only Russian military vehicles were driving back and forth along the roads.

My family was looking for Russian soldiers who would go to Krakow and who would be willing to take us with them. They asked many Russian soldiers about this, but some did not go to Krakow and others refused to take us explaining that it was very risky to travel and they did not want to take the responsibility of exposing us to the danger of being killed by bombs or mines hidden in the ground. My family did not give up so easily on the idea of going back to Krakow so they were not discouraged and continued to ask others. Finally, after many refusals, they found some Russian soldiers who were driving to Krakow and who agreed to take us for some bottles of whisky. However, they did not have room for all of us so my brother Leo and I remained in Rzeszow to follow them on another time. After a short time of packing, they were ready to go. They did not have a much baggage, only several small bags, but they were neatly dressed and wore shoes. One would probably be surprised why I stressed wearing shoes. This was because we did not wear any shoes from the time when we left the farmers' hiding place up until we came to Rzeszow. We had lost our shoes escaping the falling bombs so having shoes was now such a special thing for us. We bought shoes in Rzeszow as well as some clothes. We threw away our dirty and shabby clothes, which we never changed.

My sisters and brother Sam left. We waited anxiously for news from them and if they arrived safely. After several days, the good news came that after rather a frightening ride, they were safe in Krakow and that my sister got an apartment. She was smart, energetic and she went to the housing department, which assigned apartments to families who lived in Krakow but lost their apartments during the war. There were lines of people trying to get an apartment. It was not an easy or a simple task to get one. They asked all kinds of questions, but luckily she got a nice apartment in a residential part of the city. They sent us the address where it was located.

Now my brother Leo started to search intensively for Russian soldiers who would drive us to Krakow. This time, it went a little easier and he found some young soldiers who were willing to take us with them in their military vehicle. I was so excited about going back to Krakow that I could not sleep the night before our departure from Rzeszow. The next day, we started the trip very early in the morning, but during the journey my mood changed. The excitement from the day before was replaced by nerve-racking fear. Every time I heard from a far an explosion of bombs my heart skipped a beat and these explosions were heard almost all the way to Krakow.

Along the roads I saw burned houses, demolished houses and burnt and broken trees in the forests. It was a picture of destruction and devastation. One could see overturned vehicles and even corpses lying on the ground. I averted my eyes away from the dead people. I felt nauseous. To travel in the wartime was very dangerous and risky. There were mines all over the ground. These were bombs that had not exploded all over the roads. Our driver, though he was young, was very experienced and took great precautions, watching out for bombs. One could not be too careful. One could not always know if there was a mine underground. Unexpectedly, the vehicle could hit a bomb or a mine and our vehicle could be demolished within seconds while we were inside. It would be preposterous to die so close to the end of the war under such circumstances. I

prayed to God to save us. I was thinking about my family in Krakow who were waiting impatiently for our arrival.

CHAPTER 40

After many hours of tension and gripping fear, we were relieved to arrive safely in Krakow. The vehicle stopped in front of a four-story building. A little shaky, I got off the vehicle after so many hours of riding on bumpy roads and cramped in the military vehicle. We went inside the house and there was an elevator that took us to the second floor. My family greeted us with great joy. They had waited anxiously for our arrival. We were so happy to be together again. After two years of living in hiding and the latter in the small towns, this apartment seemed so impressive and so luxurious. There were electric lights, running water, a bathroom, balconies and an elevator. All these luxuries were such a great comfort, which we had almost completely forgot existed.

The first thing that I did was to take a hot bath. It was a great treat because for many years, we did not take a bath. The last time was before we left Krakow for Debica. While in the hiding place, we were deprived from basic hygienic practices such as washing and brushing teeth. After leaving the hiding place, we were glad to have enough water to wash ourselves. The first time we found a piece of soap, we were overjoyed. This was in Mielec. It was amazing that we did not have any rash on our skins. How refreshing and delightful it was to be dipped in warm water. I was so relaxed and did not think about anything. After a good and tasteful meal, I rested and talked with my family.

When I rested in a bed and stretched out comfortably, I felt so good. For more than two years, I did not experience the luxury of sleeping in a bed except for the brief time in Rzeszow. We slept on straw on the ground or on the floor except for the brief time in Rzeszow when I slept in a bed. I fell asleep soundly and slept for many hours. When I woke up, for the first moment I

thought that I was dreaming. I could not visualize what happened to me and where I was. Everything looked so strange and unusual. After a while, I came to my senses and began to remember that I had left Rzeszow and I came to Krakow. This was a joyous reality. Finally, I was home.

For couple of days, I stayed home, rested, ate and listened to the radio. Imagine how marvelous it was to have a radio with its music and news and not to have to depend on rumors. After several days of a kind of intoxication with the new and luxurious conditions of my life, I decided to venture out to say hello to the city, which I loved and longed to see again. Why did I not go out the next day after my arrival? Was it not a pretext to claim that I wanted to rest? Maybe I was unconsciously holding back the fear of being disappointed. I did not want to see a different city from the one that I had longed for. This is similar to being reunited with a loved one after a long separation. It has the potential to produce anxiety about possible change.

I walked the streets, which I knew so well and I visited the places where I used to play. I went to look at houses where my friends had lived. I saw monuments, historical buildings and Wawel. I went to the river Vistula (Wisloka) where I used to sit with my friends. All these places played such an important role in my young life.

I walked and walked until my legs started to hurt me. I desperately wanted to find Krakow in way it was when I left it five years ago, but this was not the same city. At first it was hard to pinpoint why it was a different Krakow. What was changed in the City? Krakow was not Krakow anymore. These were the same buildings and the same names of the streets. The city did not show signs of the ravages of war. Houses were not burnt and buildings were not destroyed nor demolished. Stores were open and ready for business, people walked the streets and children played and made noise. Tramways and buses were full of people taking rides. There was the usual city traffic.

Suddenly, the truth hit me. Yes, yes I exactly knew what happened that had changed the city forever. There was a Krakow without Jews. This realization distressed me. 60,000 Jews lived in Krakow on the eve of World War II. This town without Jews became more provincial. It lost its vitality, dynamics and glamour. The stores were run by others, but lost the spirit of enterprise. The houses in the Jewish quarter were not empty because other people moved in, but the houses were not kept and some were rundown. The Jewish quarter was called Kazimierz. It was named after a Polish King who invited the Jews to settle in Poland in order to develop the polish trade. Before World War II, Jews were a vital part of the Polish population of Krakow. Now the city seemed to be so quiet and subdued. There were no Jewish merchants selling their merchandise, there were no Jewish schools attended by Jewish children, there were no Jewish children playing outside, there were no Jewish workers, there were no more Jewish doctors, scientists, writers and painters. There were no Jewish newspapers, theatre or libraries. There were no religious Jews dressed up for the holidays and hurrying to the synagogues. The synagogues were destroyed, abandoned and the graves were broken. The whole Jewish life and Jewish culture was rooted out no longer existed. Only the ghosts of the perished Jews remained present.

The realization of this sad reality distressed me greatly. Tired and in a very bad mood, I returned home. For several days I stayed home because I had no desire to go out again and to face again the sight of the city without Jews, but my family urged me to go out and not to submit myself up to grief because it would not help anybody and could do a great harm to my health. Their logic persuaded me and I reluctantly left my apartment.

CHAPTER 41

My family did not see anybody whom they knew before the war or any relatives either. It was not yet the end of war and one had a hope that after

the liberation and defeat of the Germans, the Jews would return to Krakow. At this time we did not fully know about the great tragedy, which befell our nation. Day after day single Jews started to arrive in the city. They were Jews who came out from bunkers and forests, Jews who survived as Christians, Jews who were in underground organizations and Jews who were partisans. We met Jewish soldiers who served in the Russian army as well. We aquatinted with Jews who lost their families and Jews who did not know what had happened to their families. Before the war, the majority of them were living in small towns or villages. Now they were afraid to return to the places where they lived before the war. There were cases when a Jew returned home and claimed his property or asked to be given back things, which they left in their neighbors' homes, the Poles refused to return them and even killed them at times so they went to live in bigger cities, namely Krakow. In Krakow, the Jews felt more secure and living in a big city had great advantages as well. There were police and the city administration enforcing laws. They could also meet other Jews and they could get help from the Jewish committee. Due to these life-threatening dangers to which they could be exposed to by staying in small towns and villages, the remnants of Jewish survivors concentrated in big cities such as Krakow.

A Jewish committee was formed right away in order to help all of these Jews who had no means to support themselves or had no place to stay. We were in a better situation because we had an apartment and food to eat. We had lived in Krakow before the war and when we had lost our apartment so it was easier to get one. In our apartment during the occupation lived Germans who escaped; therefore the apartment was available.

Every Jew whom we met was like a brother, not a stranger. Everyone had a different gruesome story to tell. Each of them miraculously survived. We compared all of our experiences. Every one of them went through a hell. Some of them were young, some of them were old, some were women, some were men and it even happened that a child had survived. Some of the survivors left their

children in Christian houses. However, when they came to claim them, the people who saved them did not want to return them and the matter was left in the hands of the court.

We heard many unbelievable stories. Some stories were heartwarming in describing the goodness of people who endangered their own life in helping the hunted Jew and people who were brave, courageous and righteous. On the other hand, there were some sad and depressing stories demonstrating the bestiality and inhuman savagery of some people who, for personal gains or just for kicks or hatred to Jews, killed innocent people. There were people who murdered other human beings mercilessly because their hearts were full of hate and they possessed murderous instincts.

Righteous people were from all walks of life. Some were educated and some were simple people. They ranged from very poor to very rich. Some were religious while others were not. They were of a variety of different nationalities: Poles, Ukrainians and even Germans. There was a young Jew who hid himself in the forest and who was helped by a thief who was actually in jail for robberies. He was bringing him food. This thief lived in the same village where he lived. This was a very fascinating story.

A group of Jews was hiding in a forest and peasants spotted them making fire and went to a German soldier who was stationed not far away and denounced the Jews. The German went with the peasants to the forest and arrested the Jews. This group did not have any guns to defend themselves. The peasants left. They were sure that the German officer would take them to the Gestapo, the German secret police. The Jews were frightened in thinking that it was the end of their life. After the peasants left, he said to them not to fear. He assured them that he was not going to hurt them. He advised them to leave this place right away. He took them in his car and moved them to another part of the forest. He helped them to dig another bunker. For the duration of his stay in some military unit, which was located in the vicinity, he supplied them with

food. When he was leaving with his unit, he left them a large quantity of provisions. This was a German soldier who had a good heart and took pity on human beings that were hunted as wild animals. For sure he was not a Nazi.

There was a Polish doctor who hid a whole family in his house. There was a young Polish girl who hid an old religious Jew and nobody in her family knew about this and there was a leader in a very anti-Semitic Polish underground, but his comrades did not expect him of being Jewish. Otherwise they would have killed him.

Some stories had a happy ending, but most stories were sad. They were stories involving horrendous suffering, which so many Jews were subjected to and failed to survive. I want to mention only one macabre story told by a surviving husband who came back from a concentration camp. His young wife was hiding in the village with her little sister. When the peasant noticed that she was pregnant, he wanted to get rid of her so he murdered her with her child inside. He did not kill her little sister, but he threw her out. The youngster was blond and blue eyed and looked like a Polish girl. She was wandering in the village and when people asked who she was, her answer was that she was an orphan. The peasants believed her. She worked very hard on a farm and she was raised as a Christian. She almost forgot her past and talked and behaved as a country girl. Her brother-in-law had great difficulties finding her in a village. At first she did not recognize him. When he took her back to Krakow, she was bewildered. She was even afraid to go into an elevator. It was a happy ending for her, but not for her pregnant sister. There were too many tragic stories. It was painful to hear these stories.

CHAPTER 42

The winter passed. People anxiously waited for the news that Germany was defeated. We were listening to the radio. The news was broadcast from England

and gave accurate and true information. The news written in German newspapers never told the truth about their losses.

There came a moment for which the whole world waited. It was announced that Germany finally capitulated and surrendered. On April 15 the war in Europe ended. It was a great day for the whole civilized world. The whole of humanity celebrated the collapse of Nazi Germany. It was a costly victory in human life, but it saved the world from fascism, dictatorship and from returning to barbarism and slavery. Nazi Germany ceased to exist.

After the war, the truth about the destination of the transported Jews from villages, towns and cities came to light and the truth was shocking. During the war years, Jews lived in an illusion. They wanted to believe that Jews who were deported lived and were working in different places. They did not know that all these people were sent to concentration camps such as: Oswiescim, Majdanek, Treblinka and many others where they were burnt. The German genius invented a very sophisticated method of mass murder. It was an ingenious plan of annihilation for millions of people in gas chambers in a short period of time. It was carried out with efficiency and precision. How could someone of sound mind imagine such an unimaginable bestiality? The ovens in concentration camps were very busy, burning human bodies day and night without any stop and a dense, dark smoke was coming out from the chimneys and towered high in the sky. If the smoke could talk it would tell of the macabre of human suffering. The ovens were not short of fuel because one transport load of Jews followed another and this was going on continuously. The Germans were in a hurry to accomplish their goals.

A crime of such a magnitude could not be comprehended by reason and explained rationally. One could wonder how this could happen in the twenty century in a civilized world. When American and Russian soldiers liberated the camps, the picture of human misery and deterioration shocked them. Many soldiers cried. They found the surviving Jews in an extremely bad shape. They

were skinny to such a degree that there was almost no meat on their bones and they had sunken eyes. It was a pity to look at them, but the will to live still was burning in their emaciated bodies. With great joy they welcomed their liberators and they kissed their hands.

Sick people were placed in hospitals and others, who were in a better condition, were placed in a camp where they could regain their strength. When they felt stronger, they left the camps and started to arrive in Krakow. The Jewish committee, who operated in Krakow, found lodging for them and provided them with some money for food. They were single people who were looking for their relatives and hoping that may be someone from their families survived. Most of the time, they were disappointed in not finding anybody. Only a few lucky ones met a surviving relative. They mourned the lost ones. They were not only broken physically, but also mentally. Time was needed to heal their wounds.

Jews in hiding places, forests or on Christian papers (pretending to be Christian) suffered a lot, but their bad experiences could be described and they also had a chance of survival. No language could express the horrendous experiences of the Jews in concentration camps. There were no proper words, which could describe the bestiality to which they were exposed day after day. There was almost no chance of staying alive. Our happiness of surviving the war was marred by the great tragedy of our nation. We cried and cried and could not stop.

CHAPTER 43

We were looking for our relatives as well. From our large family, only my mother's cousin survived in a concentration camp. She lost a husband, a child and a brother. She stayed with us, but after a very scary experience, she left Poland. Jews who had nowhere to stay were placed in a building, which before the war was a dormitory for Jewish students and one day, my mother's cousin went to visit a friend from the concentration camp who lived there.

Unexpectedly, a mob of Poles surrounded this building and started calling out nasty and offensive names while threatening to kill all of the Jews inside. The frightened Jews locked the entrance door, but this was not of great help. The mob armed with sticks and knives started to storm the door and to try to break it. The scared Jews did not know what to do and ran to the attic. It was only a matter of minutes before they would succeed in entering the building. In the last minute, a miracle happened. A Jewish soldier in the Russian army happened to pass this street where this house was located.

He heard screams and saw the mob breaking the door. He instantly figured out what was happening and without giving a second thought, he took out his gun and started to shoot in the air. He threatened that if they did not leave right away, he would shoot them.

The mob dispersed momentarily and ran way fast. He saved the Jews inside. These holocaust survivors were very fortunate that a Jewish soldier was in the right place and in the right time to save them.

In the same day, there were several incidents of Jews being killed by Poles. This was how the survivors who came back were welcomed by the city. This experience made such a strong impression on my mother's cousin Frymka that she did not want to stay any longer in Poland. She packed her meager belongings and left Krakow. She crossed the Polish border illegally and went to Paris.

There were other violent acts against the Jews in Krakow. There were riots and an accusation of ritual murder. The sentiments of some of the Poles were shown during the funerals of holocaust survivors who were killed in the city of Nowy Targ. Seeing so many Jews who gathered to give their last respect to the innocent victims, they loudly expressed their disappointment by making the following comment: "From which chimney did so many Jews come out?"

One night, a knocking at our door suddenly awakened us. We were wondering who it might be. I was scared because it reminded me of our experience in the town Mielec when the police knocked at our door when their intention was to kill

us. When we opened the door, there was no police. There were frightened Jews who escaped from the pogrom in Kielce. They came to sleep over in our house. Even with the all of these sad incidents in the city, it was safer to live in a big city than in a small one.

Day after day, there was bad news about sporadic killings of Jews in villages, towns and cities. They were committed by either hate or by greed, but it did not make any difference because whatever the cause, the results were just the same. The Jews were in consternation. After years of constant humiliation, immeasurable suffering, they hoped that when the war ended they would finally find some peace in their broken life. They did not expect to be exposed to danger again. However, they were now free people and could not accept this behavior and live in such a hostile atmosphere.

More than half of the disillusioned holocaust survivors decided to leave the country for other countries. They were hoping to find a more favorable environment to start a new life. The exodus of Jews had begun on a great scale. Among the leaving Jews were my brothers. We girls stayed. There were Jews who remained in Krakow because of various circumstances. Some were too depressed to start a new journey. Some were lacking strength, energy or courage. There were some who believed that the government would eliminate the criminal element and enforce law and order. It was not an easy undertaking to go to a strange country without the knowledge of the language and without any means and besides, there was some risk involved.

CHAPTER 44

We had a big family from my mother and father's side. We had aunts, uncles, cousins, once removed, twice removed and many more distant relatives. Our family lived in the east of Poland, in the west of Poland and in small towns, in cities and even in villages. It was a middle class family, rich and poor, educated and less educated, but all of them were honest, hard working

people with family values, moral and religious. My grandparents were proud that they never were in court. Our family lived in Poland for many years. My ancestors probably came from Russia at one time and settled in Poland. Before World War II, almost nobody from my family immigrated to other countries. I was told that my father had a dream and wanted to immigrate to United States, but his parents held him back. They were a close family and did not want to be separated from him. My father was an obedient son so he listened to them. He gave up his dream and stayed in Poland. Our life would have turned out differently if he would have followed his dream and disobeyed his parents. We would have been spared so much suffering. We were fortunate to survive, but we could have easily shared the fate of millions to be burned in the gas chamber. While in hiding, we were thinking about our relatives and wondered what had happened to them.

Now being free, we tried hard to find out what happened to them. We were heartbroken to find out that all of my relatives perished except my mother's cousin who survived in a concentration camp. I mentioned this before. The majority of my closest relatives were burnt in gas chambers. A relative and her sister's little boy were hidden by a peasant, but he did not intend to hide them and save their lives. He was greedy and he wanted to rob her knowing that she had dollars and not Polish money because Polish money had no value at this time. She managed to tear the money into small pieces before the police killed them. They lived in Debica where we stayed after leaving Krakow. She was a pretty young woman and the little boy was adorable, blond and blue eyed. Her husband survived in Russia.

My Uncle Moses and his wife went to hide with a peasant. They did not survive, but we did not know what happened to them. Their youngest son David, had papers to show that he was a Christian and was working in Germany as a Pole. He did not survive, but we did not know what happened to him. We were not sure if they recognized him as being Jewish. Their older son Samuel, who was a blond

and blue eyed, looked like a Polish boy and he had good papers and lived as a Christian in Warsaw. He would have survived if he had not make a blunder. He had a girl friend in Debica and he wrote letter to her. A worker in the post office who knew him recognized his handwriting, since the letter came from Warsaw, it gave the postal worker a clue that he was hiding there. He denounced him to the police. They had the address on the envelope so they found him and arrested him. We did know how he died. His beautiful sister Hanka, who was also light blond and blue eyed, was working in Krakow as a maid in a Polish house. They did not have the slightest idea that she was Jewish. They liked her very much because she was a very good worker. She was also able to easily survive because of her looks. She had a boy friend who was in the city of Tarnow at this time. She had a day off on the weekend so she decided to visit him. She had bad luck. Unfortunately in Tarnow that day, there was an "action." The Germans surrounded the ghetto, killing Jews or took them for transportation ;and the Germans caught her.

Many of our relatives were living in small towns of Eastern Poland. My uncle From Hersh was a manager of a village and a mansion, which belonged to a Polish count. Before World War II, the anti-Semitism in Poland was growing and the count was pressured to remove him from his job. When my uncle lost his job, he and his wife with their two sons, decided to immigrate to United States. However, when the war broke out, they were stocked in Poland. They tried to find a peasant, who was willing to hide them, but they did not succeed and they were deported. Their two beautiful sons managed to escape from the transport and went to join the partisans in the forest. When they walked through a village the Ukrainian police stopped them, since they knew them. Everyone in those villages knew them. They ordered them to kiss each other and in cold blood they shot them. A peasant from this village told this tragic event to us. In what circumstances the rest of our large family perished we could not find out.

Our friends and acquaintances from Debica did not survive the war. All of these beautiful children, the boys and girls whom my brother Sam was teaching, perished in concentration camps. Their young lives and their dreams were gone forever. The tailor who was our landlord, their son, two unmarried daughters, the married son, his wife and little son were killed.

What happened to my friend Bronek and family who left Krakow to cross the border to the part of Poland occupied in this time by Russians I failed to find out. Franka went to town Kiele to stay with one of her sisters, perished in a concentration camp. Her sister, who survived as a Christian, told this story. Zenek, who managed to escape from Debica after the liquidation of the ghetto of Debica, went by train to Krakow and was in the Plaszow camp in Podgorze. Commander Goetz, who was hanged by the Poles after the war, killed him on the spot. Goetz was later mentioned in the Schindler's list movie. My pretty friend Sydia, with green, dreamy eyes perished with her parents, brother and sister in a concentration camp. My good-hearted friend Cesia, who had the dream to become a doctor, perished with her family in a concentration camp.

These were the tragic ends of all these characters about which I wrote in my book. It was very painful to me upon learning that no one even survived.

CONCLUSION

The Jews had no other alternative, but to put the morbid past behind them and to move on with their lives. Though this was not an easy task, they did it. Was this a result of a strong impulse to live or was this a response to Jewish enemies who wanted to root out Judaism from the face of the world and to annihilate the Jewish nation, who gave so much to the world? It could be a combination of both.

Single people longing for love and companionship got married. New life was rooted and blossomed. Children were born.

After a period of sadness and mourning, our healing began and we organized our life as best as we could in an attempt to lead a normal life. Being young helped a lot to overcome the state of deep sadness. I started a new chapter in my life. I went to school and I had new friends. I had many dreams, desires and expectations and life was so exciting. I never forgot the past and the bad experiences, but the past lurked in the back of my head.

I lived in Krakow for many years where I finished Jagielonski Universytet, and got a Masters Degree. After years of accomplishments, happiness and disappointments, I left Krakow and came to United States and started a new chapter in my life.

